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DISCOURSES

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

DELIVERED IN

THE ISLAND OF BARBADOES,

BY THE

REV. H. E. HOLDER,

OF THAT PLACE.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

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DISCOURSES

VARIOUS SUBJECTS

THE LAND OF MARIANO



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TO

THE HON. HENRY FRERE,

PRESIDENT OF THE ISLAND OF BARBADOES.

HONOURABLE SIR,

WHEN I requested your permission to confide this volume to your protection, I was actuated by a double motive: I could not fail to be anxious to bring myself forward to the public, as one who shared in your friendship, and had experienced the most signal instances of your good opinion and esteem. But I had another more disinterested object in view; that of testifying the strong sense I entertained of the worth of the personage, who condescended to lend his name to my work. Was I singular in such sentiments, my convictions are too well founded, to render me backward in professing them: but how much greater must be my confidence, when I am conscious that not one of our mutual fellow-citizens would hesitate to concur in the highest encomiums I could pass on your public and private character.

At present I shall only observe that, if to possess the love and esteem of all who know you, in every instance of your variously-extended connections, can endear you to society; and if to have conducted the administration of this colony with such wisdom, integrity and impartiality, as to gain every suffrage, can entitle you to the plaudits of your country, the name of FRERE will ever be mentioned as an example of every social and patriotic virtue, and be consecrated in every breast which is capable of feeling the influence of private friendship or public spirit. For my own part, I intreat you to believe, that, to the latest moment of my existence, I shall remain,

Your Honour's most grateful

and obedient, humble servant,

HENRY EVANS HOLDER.

Bristol, January 1, 1792.

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DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE I.

ON THE

DISUSE AND THE ABUSE OF PRAYER.

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OF THE

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James W. Vol. 2

DISCOURSE I.

ST. JAMES, Chap. IV. Part of the 2d and 3d Verses.

Ye have not because ye ask not : Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss.

NOTHING seems to be more evident to a mind properly tinged with religion, than that the difuse, and the abuse of prayer, are two great evils in the moral world, and should be carefully avoided by every one who would wish to approve himself to God.

When we consider the relation which subsists between God and ourselves; as our creator and preserver—the dispenser of that providential care on which depend our safety and comfort—and the author of all the blessings we enjoy, not only those external ones
which

which cheer our present journey through life, but those higher, internal delights, which are our privileges as travellers to a better ;—when, I say, we consider that he does every thing for us, at the same time that we are conscious that we can do nothing for ourselves ;—we cannot but be convinced that prayer is a duty of the strongest and most constant obligation on us ;—not with a view of informing him of our wants, who knoweth all things by his own essential omniscience, but in testimony that we feel them—that we are sensible that our own unassisted efforts cannot relieve them ; and that He alone is able to help us, and to bring us out of all our trouble.

The neglect of so indispensable a duty, we may then well conceive to be of great injury to our obtaining that assistance, which, whether we ask it or not, we cannot but greatly stand in need of. It is highly reasonable to suppose, that in the scheme of Providence, as laid down in the comprehensive mind of an all-knowing God, they whom he foresees will be unwilling to acknowledge their dependance on him,
by

by an habitual effusion of their souls to him in prayer, will receive but a small share of his bounty; and an infinitely smaller than that which will be the portion of those who he fore-knows will look up to him for every thing which they can desire or possess:—It is besides to be observed that the omission of such a duty necessarily implies the omission of many—perhaps of all others; and the commission of many grievous sins:—for a mind so alienated from God as to reject the intercourse which is maintained with him by prayer, is in a state but little capable of discharging any of its duties; and abandoned to any evil impressions which its spiritual enemies may be inclined to make upon it.—If, therefore, we allow that vice is liable to punishment, we can have no difficulty in believing that the neglect of prayer, from its own turpitude, and also from the bad principles and bad consequences to be inferred from it, must be a heinous sin in the sight of God, and must deter him from bestowing on the neglectors of it, that distribution of his favors which he showers down upon those, who
seek

seek him by constant and earnest supplication.

The duty of prayer being established, it is evident that the proper manner of performing it requires to be discriminated from the undue discharge of it;—or, in other words, that we may pray aright, and we may “pray amiss.”

I design in the following discourse to consider my text as extending to both of the divisions of the subject of prayer, which I have already cursorily mentioned; accordingly I propose,

1st. To shew, whence it is that we are guilty of that offence of not asking, which the apostle assigns as the reason of our not having.

2dly. The cause of our asking amiss, which he declares to be the occasion of our asking and not receiving.

Lastly, I shall endeavour very briefly to shew what prayer is, in its genuine perfection and excellence.

And first—to shew whence it is that we are guilty of the offence of “not asking,”
which

which the apostle assigns as the reason of our "not having."

There is a haughty perverse spirit—a spirit of pleasure—and a spirit of idleness, which are great preventatives of our asking.

Various have been the disorders produced in the human mind, by the disobedience of its first earthly parent:—The same poison mixing with different ingredients, has discovered itself by effects proportionably different; preserving, however, in this fatal instance, an uniformity with itself—that it has degenerated and corrupted every constitution into which it has been introduced.

In some, we see it manifesting itself by an untoward, crooked, perverse, self-willed disposition, refusing to go right, only because it will go wrong:—such a disposition as this is extremely averse from prayer.—In human friendships and intimacies, we find that the grand bond of union is a similitude of disposition: In that most refined and sublime friendship—the friendship of the good man with his GOD, the connection is the closer, as his mind is more and more exalted by the exercise

exercise of virtue, to a nearer resemblance with the heavenly object of his love and veneration; and this friendship, which is the very soul of piety, can only be maintained by frequency and fervency of devotion:—This being the case, we may easily conceive, that such a spirit as that we are considering, must be the very contrary to that which is consistent with the constant use of prayer:—a disposition, of which the tendencies are decidedly wrong, must be as dissimilar from the divine standard of perfection as it can be; its nature as well as its affections must be as alien from it as light from darkness:—such a disposition must have a natural antipathy to the very act of prayer:—Its wants and necessities produce no other effect than to irritate and provoke it;—and as it cannot but be sensible, by mortifying experience, that it is, of itself, unable to relieve and supply them; so such an experience is sure to be followed—not by an humble application to the only certain source of help and protection; but by the most undutiful murmurings against him: As the disposition in question is very
nearly

heavily connected with a spirit of pride and high-mindedness, and indeed, upon many accounts may be considered as the same with it; so it has a direct opposition and enmity to any acknowledgment of its own insufficiency:—though therefore it may be conscious that it cannot supply its own manifold exigencies—though it may be sensible that God alone is mighty to save—yet it cannot prevail upon itself to confess its own weakness, and to crave assistance from him:—day rolls on after day; and the perverse and obstinate sinner casts not one look of submission to Heaven:—a blessing is bestowed and enjoyed, without extorting one expression of gratitude to the Donor. A misfortune next assails him: not one recollecting thought arises—not one act of contrition is performed—lest haply the evil which has befallen him, should have arisen as a natural consequence of his own imprudence, was a punishment for his transgressions: not one ejaculation is offered to the Power, whose paternal care assumes the form of chastisement:—“I have sinned—Oh! deal
b “according

“according to thy loving kindness and mercy:”
—but, on the contrary, many a rebellious,
towering idea starts up in his mind, and ag-
gravates the severity of the stroke which has
excited them:—‘Is this,’ he would say,
‘the look of a God of mercy and goodness?’
‘—Is it thus that he would engage his crea-
‘tures to love and reverence him?—To such
‘a Being shall I address myself for assistance?’
‘—Can I expect that the hand which has
‘wounded, will be extended to heal me?—
‘No—rather let me bear his inflictions un-
‘moved:—to his power I must yield; and
‘submit to its exertions, as far as he may be
‘pleased to make them:—when he sees pro-
‘per to desist—and not till then—I shall find
‘relief:—nor shall I attempt so unavailing a
‘work, as to endeavour to hasten it, by su-
‘ing at his throne.’ These reflections may,
perhaps, appear stronger than the reality: and
hardy as human audacity is, upon too many
occasions, it may be thought that it is not
presumptuous, to the degree here insinu-
ated. But though they may not be openly
and directly made, in all the virulence sug-
gested

gested, yet I would appeal to the experience of every one of you, whether you have not heard complaints uttered against Providence, which, in effect, spoke the same opprobrious language?—Nay, I will appeal to your consciences, whether there have not been moments of disappointment and calamity, when you yourselves have been ready to join in such a chorus of accusation, as, when stript of the disguises which involuntary shame had spread around it, had but little less of impiety in it, than the expressions I have attributed to the man who is under the guidance of a haughty perverse spirit:—to the same tribunal I appeal, to know, whether, in such a moment, you have had the least desire to fly for succour to the only Being who could afford it to you?—And, if afterwards the conviction of your error stole in upon your minds, whether you have not found it indispensibly necessary—first, to expel the evil spirit, ere you had inclination, or even ability, to approach the throne of grace with your petition?

2dly. A spirit of pleasure is also another

b 2.

form

form that the corruption of human nature has assumed; and another great obstacle to the exercise of prayer.

There is the strongest sympathy between human nature and earthly pleasures and pursuits; and where the will goes along with this bias, the attachment becomes a real idolatry. Such a passion as this necessarily excludes every other affection: its influence is so powerful and universal, that every competitor must yield, and at best be contented with a subordinate place in the heart: even God himself knocks in vain at the door and cannot gain admittance;—"Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of Him," these sons of earth cannot raise their attention above sensible objects; and therefore have not a thought to dedicate to him, "whom no man hath seen, and who dwelleth in light inaccessible:"—to tell them of the necessity of addressing him in prayer, would be to expose yourself to their ridicule and contempt:—They have no conception of the duty or expediency of supplicating a God to whom they are strangers; and with whom, while their consciences

consciences are laid asleep, and their hearts are entirely alienated from him, they can have no internal cognation or connection: if they regard him at all, it is only as a God afar off; and such an one therefore, as they would not wish to bring near to them by the earnest entreaties of devout and constant supplication:—‘ We do not deny,’ they will say, ‘ what you affirm concerning God, that he ‘ gave us being, and placed us in this world : ‘ —but we can never be induced to believe ‘ that we are posted here to deny ourselves ‘ any of the pleasures which our station can ‘ supply us with, or to occupy ourselves ‘ about things, that pass beyond our own ‘ sphere :—we take what is given us, contentedly and quietly ; and as we do not presume to hanker after what we have not, so ‘ we shall not be prevailed upon to ask for ‘ any thing farther.’—You all know, my brethren, that there is many a man, who goes through life, professing such sentiments, until he arrives at that period, which will probably undeceive him, by drawing aside the curtain which veils eternity from his sight :

but even then, perhaps he may continue under the influence of the "strong delusion" which has seized him, and he may die as thoughtlessly as he has lived :—I say it is possible—and that God may have totally withdrawn the light from him in this world, which he had long shed in vain on his benighted soul :—but when this dreamer is launched into eternity, what do you suppose will be the ideas which present themselves to his mind, as he awakes to the unavoidably conviction which awaits him beyond the grave ?—I put the question to you, that you may ask it of yourselves ; and I trust to your own consciences to give you such an answer as you cannot despise.

We see then that a spirit of pleasure like that we have been describing, has nothing of devotion in its constitution : it is easily acquired, and with the greatest difficulty to be shaken off, and therefore most carefully to be guarded against ; as that, which of all others detaches us from God, and weans us from every inclination to aspire after that spiritual union with him, which the pious christian enjoys,
who

who pours forth his soul to him in prayer, and feels it return into his bosom, with those blessed communications of grace, which we are assured will never be withheld from those who earnestly desire to partake of them.

3dly. Nor is the idle spirit less a proof of the degredation of our nature, or less an obstacle to the use of prayer, than those which we have already considered. As to the human body there belong disorders of languor, as well as those of acute and violent tendencies, and all equally fatal to its health; so there are vices of the human mind, which although torpid and inactive in their operations, are yet of most serious injury to it:—such is the spirit in question: a spirit which enervates every faculty, chills every ardour of affection, and reduces the man almost to the stupidity of a brute, and the insensibility of a stone:—from this proceeds that luke-warm spirit for which the church of Laodicia was condemned by our Lord, to utter rejection and destruction;—and when it gives birth to it in individuals, it is no less dangerous and injurious. —Religion is a work which requires the
active

active employment of our powers to be duly performed ; and as it is the service of the creature to his Creator, so prayer, which is the address of the creature to his Creator, made in the vigour and energy of that service, can only be offered with effect, if at all, by a heart alive to the invigoration of devotion, and warmed by heavenly affections :—circumstances wholly incompatible with that spirit of slumber which we are condemning, and which, therefore, is evidently repugnant to the discharge of the important duty under consideration.

Having now discussed my first head, I proceed to shew,

II^{dly}, The cause of our asking amiss, which the apostle declares to be the reason of our asking and not receiving.

The effect of habit upon the human mind is too well known, and too generally acknowledged, to be particularly insisted on. In the present instance it is highly probable that the exercise of prayer may be continued, through the prevalence of custom, long after the spirit of it is extinct : early impressions from wise
and

and good parents and instructors, may have established the use of it, although they were unable to imprint the genuine essence of it upon the inward man. It is plain, that he who merely from custom, continues to pray both in private and public, must pray amiss: his devotion must be only a service of the lips—a by-business of his life, transacted drowsily and faintly, with desultory and slight endeavours, as humour or convenience may furnish an opportunity; and it is needless to add, that such a prayer cannot be accepted; and that the petitioner who offers it, may, in his manner of praying, discover the reason of his asking and not receiving.

Those also pray amiss who pretend to offer up an acceptable service to God, while they are injuring his creatures, and offending against the peace, comfort, and security of their fellow-servants, and dishonouring themselves by different kinds of wicked and atrocious actions: “If I regard iniquity,” saith the royal psalmist, “the Lord will not hear me;”—“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law,” (and certainly then,—“He
“ that

“ that turneth away his^s mind from doing it,”)
 “ Even his prayer,” saith Solomon, “ is an
 “ abomination.”

They also are to be considered as praying amiss*, who make improper requests. To expect God to comply with our whims and humours, at the expence of others, against whom we may entertain unlawful enmities, or whom we at least disregard for the sake of our own gratification; to suppose that he will work miracles in our behalf, because we are pleased to ask for what would require a miracle to be complied with, is an expectation and a supposition which must prove abortive. In a word—in whatever sense we take the expression of praying amiss, we may be assured that such prayers—the prayer of habit—the prayer of wickedness—and the prayer of unreasonableness—can never be heard; and may, perhaps be furnished, for presuming to pervert so noble an institution, and to deform so illustrious a virtue.

* *Kakos aitrethe, Kaka, &c.* Jobius monarh apud Photium. See Mills.

Which

Which leads me to my

III^d and last head ; wherein I propos'd, very briefly, to hint at what may be considered as prayer in its genuine perfection and excellence.

Prayer is then to be regarded as a rational and an acceptable service, when it flows from a mind, imbued with a ready disposition, and an habitual inclination to devotion ; when the act itself proceeds from a principle, which in scripture is stiled the spirit of supplication ; when it is accounted as a business most important to be performed, and such as should take place of every occupation whatsoever : when it is applied to all fit seasons, and on all urgent occasions—as the beginning and end of all our daily labours—in the house of prosperity—in the moment of adversity—under the influence of sorrow and distress—of temptation and sin. To such as pray aright, the most flattering assurances of success are held out :——“ The Lord is good unto all them
“ that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh
“ him : none that wait on him shall be ashamed ;
“ they that wait upon the Lord shall renew
“ their

“ their strength ; they shall mount up with
“ wings as eagles ; they shall run and not be
“ weary ; they shall walk and not faint.” These
are figurative expressions, but yet strongly descriptive of the blessings which are promised to frequent and fervent prayers by that “ Father of Mercies and God of all Consolation,” who is elsewhere more plainly, and not less beautifully declared to be “ nigh unto
“ all that call upon him,” and willing “ to
“ hear their cry and to save them.”

To the practice then of a duty established upon the everlasting foundations of reason and religion, and recommended to us by such powerful persuasives, there is hardly any room for exhortation. I shall therefore conclude with suggesting to you a precept of St. Paul, which should never be forgotten : “ Be
“ careful for nothing, but in every thing, by
“ prayer and supplication, and thanksgiving,
“ let your requests be made known unto
“ God.”

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE II.

ON THE

LORD'S PRAYER.

MATTHEW, VI. Part of Ver. 9.

DISCOURSE II.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. vi. Part of the 9th Verse.

*Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be
thy name.*

OUR blessed Lord having, at a very early period in his public ministry, vouchsafed to deliver to the multitudes who attended on his labours of love, the most compleat system of practical religion which was ever revealed to man ; naturally extended his instructions to the article of prayer, that solemn act of devotion, known and practiced, though imperfectly, even by pagan religionists, by which the soul perpetually renews and confirms its connections and union with God ; declares its wants, its weaknesses, and errors, and implores his assistance, as the
only

only means by which they may be relieved, redressed, and corrected: and as this was a duty which the Jews had extremely corrupted, and the heathens entirely perverted, by the manner in which they respectively performed it, it was necessary that he should point out their deficiencies and faults, as well as the true spirit, in which it would become his followers to approach the Supreme Being. Accordingly, the Evangelist tells us, that he addressed to his hearers, the following pertinent observations and directions on the subject.

“ When thou prayest,” said he, “ thou
“ shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they
“ love to pray standing in the synagogues,
“ and in the corners of the streets, that they
“ may be seen of men: verily, I say unto you,
“ they have their reward: but thou, when
“ thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and
“ when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy
“ Father which is in secret, and thy Father,
“ which seeth in secret, shall reward thee
“ openly: and when ye pray, use not vain
“ repetitions, as the heathens do; for they
“ think,

“think, that they shall be heard for their
“much speaking. Be not ye therefore like
“unto them; for your Father knoweth what
“things ye have need of, before ye ask him:
“after this manner, therefore, pray ye,—
“Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed
“be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy
“will be done in earth, as it is in heaven;
“give us this day our daily bread, and for-
“give us our debts, as we forgive our debtors:
“and lead us not into temptation, but de-
“liver us from evil; for thine is the king-
“dom, and the power and the glory, for
“ever and ever. Amen.”

It must be evident to every one, that it is of the utmost importance to us, thoroughly to understand the meaning of this prayer, which our Lord has prescribed as the constant guide of our devotions; I, therefore, propose, in this, and some subsequent discourses, to lay before you the substance of the several members of which it is composed, and to make such practical application of each, as they will severally admit of.

My present intention is, to explain to you
c the

the force of the three first clauses, which have been cited in my text;—"Our Father, "which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name."

Nothing can be more emphatical and engaging, than the invocation with which our Lord begins his form of prayer. It is not to an arbitrary tyrant, and a despotic master, that he commands us to offer the supplications of trembling subjects and slaves; but the requests of loving and beloved children, to a bountiful and all powerful Father; to a Father who owns us as his children, by having created us to that life which we enjoy, and supporting us in it, as well by protecting us from the ills which surround us, as by affording the blessings which are necessary to its welfare, comfort, and convenience; above all, by having given us, through his blessed Son Jesus Christ, "the spirit of adoption where-
"by we cry, Abba Father!" Even that
"spirit which beareth witness with our spirit,
"that we are the children of God; and if
"children, then heirs, heirs of God, and
"joint heirs with Christ:" and that this invocation should fully convince us of the spirit
of

of love which animates the whole system of Christianity, each individual who uses it, is taught to address his heavenly Father by the title of "Our Father;" that he may thence learn to regard his fellow creatures as brethren, bound to him by the indissoluble tie of one common Parent, whose impartial affection should incite them to a similar comprehensiveness and enlargement of mind; which, if not always able to adopt an extensive plan of beneficence, is ever disposed to exert its utmost ability in the cause of humanity; and to approach the throne of grace, with as deep a sense of the wants and distresses of its fellow creatures, as of its own; and as sincere a forgiveness of the injuries which they have inflicted, however unprovoked, as it would wish to receive, for its own manifold offences, from the God of mercy, long suffering and compassion—and Him we are taught to look up to, as in heaven; not as limiting his presence to one place more than another; but that our minds being raised above this sublunary scene, to those blest abodes where he most especially manifests his glory

amid surrounding angels, and “the spirits of
“just men made perfect,” may be filled with
such thoughts, desires, and affections, as can
find admission in that happy society; in a
word, that when we pour out our supplica-
tions to a “Father who is in heaven,” we
may be awakened to a sense of what we must
be, to be called the sons of God:—and to this
end, the first petition which we are directed to
make, is, that “his name may be hallowed;”
that is, that it may be glorified by the con-
duct of all his creatures; and that our Lord
designed that we should conceive that the
essential, everlasting, and transcendent glory of
God, could be increased or diminished by the
obedience or disobedience of any subordinate
being; but that it was our duty to act in such
a manner, as supposing it possible for his glory
to receive any accession by our endeavours,
would best promote so noble an end; and
that “our light may so shine before men,
“that they should see our good works, and
“glorify our Father who is in heaven.”—
This may give us a general idea of the im-
port of “hallowing the name of God:”—but
is

as the name God is applied in Scripture to various meanings, it may not be unprofitable to see how far they affect the sense of the clause to which it is here annexed.

And 1st, The name of God is often used in Scripture for God himself, and praising his name and blessing it, for praising and blessing Him: and we may, in this sense, be said to hallow his name when we direct our adorations to Him alone, to the exclusion of every other object of external or mental worship. In the present ages of Christianity, idolatry is a crime which has very materially changed its form, insomuch, that in the estimation of some, it may possibly be supposed to be entirely banished; at least from the reformed Christian world; but though we do not now fall down to "the stock of a tree," or "worship a graven image," though we do not implore the intercession of saints, or the virgin; how many of us are there, whose hearts and affections are devoted to some other object than the true God! How many of us, I say, have erected an idol in our minds, which as effectually estranges them from Him, as

Balam and Astaroth ever did the children of Israel! and under such an influence, how ineffectual will any nominal professions be to our hallowing the name of God as we ought! 2dly. The name of God is also used in Scripture to signify his peculiar attributes and perfections:—this was the “name” which was proclaimed to Moses, “the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth.” With reference to this signification, we may be said “to hallow his name,” when we form right and worthy notions of Him; and upon all occasions, profess our acknowledgment of his divine perfections, so conspicuously displayed as they are in the works of creation and redemption, and so necessary to be known, in order to our comforting ourselves with becoming submission, reverence, regard and esteem towards him.

3dly. Again the name of God sometimes implies his authority and commission: Our Saviour tells us, that “He came in his Father’s name,” i. e. by his authority and with his commission: and in this application of the expression,

expression, we may be said, to hallow the name of God, when we pay due obedience to his authority wheresoever it be found; whether delegated to magistrates, or revealed in the gospel of his blessed Son, or sanctifying the exhortations of his ministers and preachers.

4thly. The name of God is also used in Scripture for his true religion. It was "his name," i. e. the true religion, which St. Paul affirmed to his Roman converts, "was blasphemed among the Gentiles through them;" and we may, on the contrary, be said to hallow it, when we act up to the principles and dictates of our religious profession, "walking honestly toward them that are without, and giving no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully;" but "adorning our profession in all things," as becomes the vocation wherewith we are called.

5thly. But besides all these figurative applications of the name of God, there is another literal one, which involves a duty by no means to be lost sight of. The duty I mean, of hallowing it, by not taking it in vain; though

the practice of profane swearing must be allowed to be only an offence in word, yet whoever seriously considers its tendency and evil consequences, must reprobate it as a most unchristian and ungodly custom. To say nothing of the impiety of invoking the Deity upon every occasion, even when we ought to wish him, if possible, to be far removed from us;—let us ask ourselves whether it is not greatly to be apprehended, that the man who so often calls upon his Maker to bear witness of his vices and his follies, will not at last grow so familiar with him, as to be indifferent about pleasing him; and gradually sink into practical atheism—the atheism of the profligate and abandoned; whose lives compose one uniform system of defiance, renunciation and denial of the God that made them?—Considering, however, the affair in the most favourable point of view, as the practice of foolish, rather than of wicked men, it must ever remain a fact, that it cannot be reconciled with that hallowing of the name of God, which our Saviour has taught us to pray for, in our daily supplications to Him.

And

And here, having briefly discussed the subject of my text, and shewn you what is intended by our calling upon God as “our Father, who is in heaven,” and praying that “his name may be hallowed,” I proceed to make some few reflections on the preceding parts of my discourse.

And first, I would suggest to you, what obligations the use of such a prayer as that in question naturally imposes—what obligations to virtue, I say, are derived from our addressing the Almighty by the name of Father! and how doubly heinous do our vices appear when considered, not as the disobedience of subjects, but as the undutifulness of children—of children to a Father, whose commands are dictated by unerring wisdom, justice, and goodness; whose will is defined in the clearest terms, whose assistances supply every deficiency, and whose rewards encourage every endeavour!

What motives of gratitude, too, arise in our minds, when we consider the grounds upon which we presume to approach him with the confidence of sons! What a complication

cation of benefits does that tender appellation of Father, thus appropriated to GOD, recall to our remembrance ! How do all the glories of the gospel-covenant unfold themselves to our enraptured sight ! How does that heavenly paternity seal to our justification, our redemption, our adoption, our relationship to Christ, our inheritance in heaven ! And under these subduing convictions of the almighty love and goodness of God, what remains for us, but to dedicate all our powers of mind and body to his service—to comply with those easy conditions on which his favour depends, to promote our eternal interests, by performing our indispensable duty !

2dly. What reasons move over for brotherly love and charity to our fellow creatures, are deducible from our regarding the Almighty as the common Parent of the human race ! And how do all the little bickerings and animosities, which alienate men from each other here below, vanish, as we advert to the bond which connects them together by their “ Father who is in heaven ;” and thence to that principle of love, which is the
great

great law of his moral government of the universe, the characteristic of the religion of his blessed Son, and the distinguishing mark of his true disciples!

Lastly. What sanctity and purity of manners do we not positively engage for, in praying that “the name of God may be hallowed!” that all the world may come to the knowledge of the true God; that every mind may be possessed with just and adequate ideas of him, that every creature may love, reverence, adore and obey him, and embracing his holy religion, live suitably to it!—How can we justify our being an exception to a rule, which we profess to wish may extend over the whole rational world; a wish, which if sincere, we cannot counteract without condemning ourselves, and which, if fictitious, is an insult upon God, for which we shall undoubtedly be punished.

DISCOURSE II

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DISCOURSE III.

ON THE

LORD'S PRAYER,

MATTHEW, VI. Ver. 10.

DISCOURSE III.

ON THE

LORD'S PRAYER.

MATTHEW VI. VERSES 9-13.

DISCOURSE III.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. vi. the 10th Verse.

*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as
it is in heaven.*

HAVING in my last discourse discussed the preceding clauses of our Lord's form of prayer, delivered as the standard of supplication to all his disciples, even to the end of the world, I proceed to explain to you the import of that part of it, which occurs in my text.

The last passage which we considered, was, Hallowed be thy name; which is in some respects, nearly connected with the subsequent members, which will form the subject of our present meditations;—for it is certain that “the name of God,” can never be so effectually “hallowed” by men, as when “his
“kingdom”

“kingdom” shall have fully “come,” and “his will be done in earth, as it is in heaven:”—and in this view, they may be considered as correlative terms; for then will “his name be hallowed,” when “his kingdom is come;” and then will “his kingdom be come,” when “his will is done in earth, as it is heaven.”

The sense however of the two last clauses, takes in a wider scope than the first, and therefore requires our consideration, although that has been sufficiently enlarged upon.

Ist. Then to examine the meaning of the former of the two—“Thy kingdom come.” If we take the expression of the kingdom of God in the sense of that kingdom or dominion of nature, which rightfully belongs to him as the Creator and Governor of the universe; in this acceptation, his kingdom must be always come, and his rights be ever the same; notwithstanding all the opposition and rebellion of his creatures: this therefore cannot be the meaning, which our Saviour designed to convey by the expression before us.

But there is another sense, to which the spirit

spirit of the petition is properly to be referred: we are to recollect there is a spiritual kingdom in this world, independent of that which we have already hinted at: that I mean, which consists in the moral obedience of rational creatures. This kingdom we know, properly and exclusively belongs to God; but yet through the fall of our first parent, originating in him, from the alienation of his will from God, and producing in all of us a similar perversion of our wills, it has been usurped by Satan, who erected a kingdom of darkness, idolatry, and wickedness, on the foundation of Adam's transgression, which still derives its existence and support from the degeneracy of his children; and as being directly opposed to that of God, is a natural impediment to the prevalence of virtue and piety.

We are not, however, to suppose, that the Almighty has ever suffered it to get the entire victory over his own power: in every son of Adam there has constantly existed an independent principle of goodness, which has uniformly subsisted, amid the ruins and disorders

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of

of human nature, to bear testimony to his authority, and protest against the encroachments, which human and diabolical usurpers might attempt to make upon it : and this natural light, as it is frequently called, has been continually kept up, assisted and strengthened by gradual revelations, which God at different times was pleased to make of himself to the Patriarchs, to Moses, and the Prophets ; until the fulness of time was come ; when the Son of God himself, should be “ manifested to destroy the works of the “ Devil,” and establish his everlasting gospel, as an effectual mean of restoring the “ kingdom of God and his righteousness” among men.

This kingdom, he has told us, is within us ; consisting in the uniform practice of virtue and godliness, founded upon the belief of the gospel, wholly converting the heart to God, and evidencing itself, by a conduct accommodated to its precepts and ordinances, as they define our duty to him, to our neighbour, and to ourselves : and the interest of this kingdom, we are commanded by our Saviour, first,

(i. e.

(i. e. primarily and principally) to seek, to ensure our temporal as well as eternal welfare.

In this world, we are farther taught, that it is only commenced: the corruptions of human nature rendering its effect upon the minds and conduct of mankind imperfect and incomplete, and its tendency to promote their happiness inadequate to the full reward of its faithful subjects in every instance: hence the perfection of the kingdom of God is to be looked for in another world, in that happy state wherein “the righteous shall shine forth
“as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,
“into which there shall, in no wise, enter
“any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever
“worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but
“where God shall wipe away all tears from
“all eyes, and there shall be no more death,
“neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall
“there be any more pain.”

It is to this blissful period, (which in Scripture is sometimes stiled the “regeneration,” or renovation of all things) that the kingdom of God must always be supposed to have its ulti-

mate and proper reference; and therefore when we pray that it may “come,” we are necessarily understood to extend our views, through all the stages of its existence, to that final consummation and conclusion of the Christian’s hopes, trials, difficulties, and dangers; praying that the gospel of Christ, the true religion and worship of God, may prevail over the whole earth; that “the kingdoms of this world may become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ,” and that we, and every individual of our fellow creatures may abandon the misrule of sin and Satan, and turn with our whole heart and affections unto the Lord our God; that so we may be enabled, with humble confidence and joyful expectation, to wish for the coming of his heavenly kingdom of retribution, and to look forward to “that blessed hope, “and the glorious appearing of the great “God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ,” with the ardor of men, who, being dead to the interests of a world, to which they are connected only by the necessity of their external condition, and having “set their affections
“on

“on things above,” “groan within themselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of their body;”—“when their earthly house of this tabernacle being dissolved, they shall have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

II. To this petition concerning “the coming of the kingdom of God,” our Lord has very consistently annexed one, very similar, and even necessary to it; “that his will may be done in earth, as it is in heaven:”—but here it may be asked—‘Do we not pray for that which must unavoidably be accomplished? and is it not absurd to request that the will of God may be done, when it cannot be resisted in earth or in heaven?’—To enquiries of this nature, the best answer we can give, is to refer them to the nature of intelligent and rational agents; from which they will collect, that the will of God, with respect to them, is, that they should obey his will, by the free choice and determination of their own; and that his influence upon such is that of persuasion and

not of compulsion ; the suggesting of motives to good, and determents from evil, the effect of which must depend upon themselves. The import of this petition, then is, that his grace may induce his creatures of this lower world to obey his laws and commands, in a manner as proportionably perfect as those higher orders of his creatures, the angelic inhabitants of heaven do ; that while yet they sojourn at a distance from those mansions, which their Lord and Saviour has prepared for them there, they may, as far as their endeavours and abilities can reach, realize upon earth, the purity and happiness of that spiritual society in heaven, the law of whose conduct is his will, and who are therefore in the enjoyment of perpetual and unalloyed felicity, because they have resigned themselves to that unerring guidance ; as we are therefore really miserable, even in this perplexed and disordered state of things, because that we so frequently swerve from that perfect rule of conduct. And here we may discover the source of many errors which are nurtured in the minds of persons, who in general support a
character

character of virtue with the world; from which, however, they sometimes depart in so striking a manner, as to discover its merit to have been more in appearance than in reality; namely, in the circumstance of their principles not being founded upon the right basis:—but one legitimate motive exists, which should determine our practice of virtue and religion; and that is, that it is the will of God that we should conform to them: whoever therefore substitutes any other in the place of that, is fundamentally wrong, and will, sooner or later, discover the vanity of his pretensions to be right: and this will plainly appear, if we recollect, that it is that constitutes the difference between virtue and vice: is it not the will of God, which from everlasting has separated them, never to be united, and having assigned to the one his approbation, and to the other his displeasure, has interwoven in our natures a secret reverence for the first, and a similar abhorrence of the latter? What other standard of obedience then can we erect preferably to this, on which the very existence of morality and religion depends?

And what is there which we can adopt, which will so immutably preserve us from error? What is the virtue which rests upon temporal convenience, worldly reputation, and present security? How flexible and yielding is it to contingencies; how ready to flatter the great, and to go down the stream with party, with custom, or with passion, when it apprehends that it will suffer by opposition. How different from this, is that virtue which has God for its author, and his will for its support, which is neither alarmed by misfortune, nor seduced by prosperity, but constantly adheres to the splendid path which Heaven has marked out, steadily “running the race that is set before it, and pressing forward to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” It is in the practice of such virtue as this, that we shall fulfill the spirit of the petition we are considering; that we can “do the will of God in earth, as it is in heaven.” An undertaking, one would think, that has every thing in it to encourage and invigorate our efforts; which, however incapable of reaching the summit of perfection, will continually

tinually bring us nearer and nearer to it ; and at whatever distance they may leave us from it, will not fail to secure us the unspeakable assistance and co-operation of divine grace, which we cannot doubt, being fully able to lead us to the everlasting happiness of the kingdom of Heaven.

That grace it is on which we are taught by the general tenor of my text, to place our sole dependance, for we are to observe that we pray to GOD, that “ his name may be hallowed,”—“ his kingdom come,” and “ his will be done.” An address which tacitly implies the impossibility of their being accomplished by any other means than his ; and thereby confirms a fact which every man’s experience of himself must amply justify ; for though it is undeniably true that the conversion of our wills is, in a great measure, our own act, we must remember that the motives by which they are converted, as well as the energy and effect of that conversion, are entirely derived from God ; and therefore that if his influence were withdrawn, we should neither will as we ought, nor even having willed,

willed, be able to act consistently with it: in conformity with this, the apostle expressly tells us, that “it is God” alone “who worketh in us, both to will and to do;” and thence deduces an argument for humility, which is equally applicable to the present occasion, and which can never be too often inculcated upon Christians, both as it is a virtue to which our natural propensity to pride and self-sufficiency is a perpetual and a formidable obstacle; and as it is one of the distinguishing graces of the gospel, which our Saviour has recommended by every thing that can engage, and enforced by every thing that can command our observance.

Another reflection which naturally arises from the petition under consideration is, that our adherence to virtue and piety, which can alone secure our happiness, here and hereafter, constitutes our compliance with the will of God. His will therefore uniformly designs the salvation of mankind, invests every individual with the power of obtaining it, and leaves him no other possibility of forfeiting it, than what is essential to the fundamental principles

principles of his nature. What motives then of love and gratitude are suggested to us, from the display of this truth, which every where meets us in the writings of the New Testament, but with peculiar propriety and force in this prayer, which our Lord intended to be perpetually present to our hearts and lips ; and how impracticable is it for us to counteract the designs of God, without being involved in the justest and heaviest condemnation ; tending as they all do, to the advancement of our own interest, and even communicated to us, by him, with this specific assurance.

Let us then, my brethren, whose efforts and industry are so earnestly and persuasively summoned into the field, contribute our utmost to accomplish that for which we are taught by our Lord continually to pray. If we can neither reform the world, nor ourselves, effectually, but by his divine assistance, let us solicit it by exerting our endeavours to set them a worthy example in our own lives, to establish the kingdom of God in our hearts, and to make his will the guide
and

and standard of our own, depending for the success of the event, upon his essential goodness, loving-kindness and mercy; to which his immutable veracity hath borne this striking testimony; "that he never faileth them
"that seek him."

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE IV.

ON THE

LORD'S PRAYER.

MATTHEW, VI. Ver. 11.

DISCOURSE IV.

ON THE

FOURTH

MATTHEW, VI. 1-18.

DISCOURSE IV.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. VI. the 11th Verse.

Give us this day our daily bread.

OUR blessed Lord, in the discharge of the benevolent and sublime office of teaching his disciples how to pray, having first directed them to petition for those things which are immediately important to their eternal welfare, proceeds, in the present instance, to a commemoration of those which concern the interests of their corporeal nature, which constitutes so necessary a part of their earthly existence: "made" by his incarnation, "like unto us, sin only excepted," he was intimately persuaded of the weaknesses and wants which inseparably attend our present condition; and being sensible of them, his unbounded

bounded goodness could not pass them by, without suggesting the means of correcting and alleviating the evil : to the same heavenly Being, whose all-sufficient aid would minister to the necessities of the spiritual man, he commands us to exhibit those of the natural ; and to hope, with the same humble and implicit trust and confidence, that they would be relieved by him, as the others ; applying to him, however, not with the idea that his omniscience is inadequate to his power, and that he does not already know, as well what we want, as “ whereof we are made ;” but that we may give him a voluntary testimony, in the sight of men and angels, of the lively sense we have of our dependence upon him, of his ability to help us, and of his mercy and compassion, which are continually exerting it in our favour, even in the relief of those wants which to human pride, estimating the divine operations by its own corrupt standard, would appear too minute for his interposition.

Accordingly in my text, he teaches us to petition our heavenly Father to “ give us
“ this

“this day our daily bread;” or rather*, in conformity with the original expression, that bread which is necessary to the support and comfort of our lives.

These words deserve our attention, in a general, as well as a particular view.

I. Taking them in the first place, in a general view of the whole passage, we discover in them, an acknowledgment of that universal providence by which all things are directed. As God is the author and creator of every species and modification of being, so does he preserve them by such provisions and supplies as are suitable to their several natures and consequent exigencies; from the seraph that worships before his throne to the worm that creeps upon the ground. His all-seeing eye descends through every gradation of existence, views every want and necessity, and views them only to remedy and remove them; it is he that “giveth us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness, making his sun to shine on the

* τον αρτον τον επιουσιονδος ημιν σήμερον. See Parkhurst's Lexicon upon επιουσιον.

“evil and on the good, and sending rain on the
“just and on the unjust; it is he who maketh
“the grafs to grow on the mountains, and
“herb for the use of man; who giveth fod-
“der unto the cattle, and feedeth the young
“ravens that call upon him;” who cloaths
“the lillies of the field” in so resplendent a
manner, that “even Solomon, in all his glory,
“was not arrayed like one of these.” In vain
do we endeavour to derogate from the univer-
sality of his care, by attributing to nature a
part of those operations which are included in
the government of the world, for nature, in
this application, is only another name for
God: second causes too, are no more than
mere instruments in his hand; and the labours
of our own industry therefore conduce to the
relief of our wants, because that he has esta-
blished them as the means of our obtaining it;
and this at last is an effect which even our in-
dustry cannot ensure, unless his blessing ac-
company and assist it. In natural, as well as
spiritual affairs, “Paul may plant, and Apol-
“los may water, but it is God alone that
“giveth the increase.” In one moment of
displeasure,

displeasure, he can “make a fruitful land
“barren, for the wickedness of them that
“dwell therein.”—“The heaven’ over our
“head he can make brass, and the earth that
“is under us iron.”—“The locust and the
“canker-worm, the caterpillar and the palmer-
“worm, are his great army, which he sends
“abroad among the children of disobedience,
“to devour their fruits, and teach them the
“obligations they owe to Him,” who alone can
“restore the years which they have eaten,” at
his command; or, if he is pleased still to af-
ford his external blessings to them, he can
withdraw every possibility of enjoying them;
for we are told, and we all must feel the force
of the declaration, that “man doth not live
“by bread only, but by every word that pro-
“ceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.”
And the most apparently favoured of the sons
of men often furnish a melancholy proof, that
“when with rebukes he chasteneth man for
“sin, he maketh his beauty to consume away
“like as it were a moth fretting a garment,”
his glory to become vanity, and his riches an
endless source of disquietude and torment.

In this general view of the subject, we are farther taught a truth, very important to the conduct of our lives, for we thence collect the lawfulness of desiring temporal blessings, in a certain degree;—in a degree which our Lord has too clearly defined to us, to be mistaken. Having sanctified this pursuit, by directing us to pray for them, he has shewn us that our desire of these things must be subordinate to those of greater importance. “It is “the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” which we are “first to seek,” and then we may laudably desire, and reasonably hope, that “all these things shall be added unto us;” having prayed that that “kingdom may “come,” and that “his will may be done “in earth as it is in heaven,” we are then permitted, nay commanded, to petition him “to give us day by day our daily bread.”

Which brings me to my

11d head, wherein I proposed to consider my text in a particular view. In this light we are led to reflect, 1st, upon the immediate subject of our petition; namely, the bread we pray for.

1st. By

1st. By bread our Saviour means here, all the necessaries, and all the comforts of life; nothing being more common, in all languages, than to express the whole by the name of some principal part, as we see in our own, that we signify by the same word, bread, the general means of subsistence: it is however to be remarked, that by using this term, which, in its proper signification, implies the plainest and most strictly necessary food, our Lord has confined the petition to a sense correspondent to that meaning, without the least design to encourage our aspiring after the superfluities of life, which nourish our propensities to ambition, pride, vanity and luxury; “making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof,” in direct opposition to the precepts of his gospel, which, in the most forcible and explicit terms, inculcates the duties of moderation, self-denial, and mortification, in every possible instance, where opportunities occur of our being seduced into irregularities and excesses. With these duties, the petition contained in my text is entirely consistent; for, as the health and vigour of the body are, in

many respects, essential to the uniform discharge of our duty, and are blessings afforded us by Providence, so the maintenance of them, by such means as we can honestly obtain, must, itself, involve a moral obligation which cannot be contrary to any requisition of the gospel; here then the line is to be drawn in ascertaining the sense of my text; we are authorized by it to pray for every thing which is necessary to the well being of our bodies; but more than this, we be assured, it does not by any means justify us in coveting, but confines our desires within the same limits which the prudent son of Jakeh affixed to his own petition; “Two things,” said he, “I have required of thee, deny me them not before I die: Remove from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.”

2d. In addition to this observation, we are to remark the manner in which the bread we ask for is requested to be afforded us; that it
may

DISCOURSE IV.

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may be given us day by day (as St. Luke expresses it) or this day [i. e. each day] (as St. Matthew has it); sufficiently for the exigencies of the present time: we are then restrained, not only from asking for present superfluities, but from an anxious pursuit, even of future necessities; from such an anxious pursuit as involves an excessive and inordinate craving, which might induce us to transgress the bounds of integrity, justice, goodness and charity, for its gratification; such a craving is both improper in itself, and adverse to our attending to more important and indispensable concerns: and in this degree, an anxious pursuit, even of necessities, for the comfort of the future life of ourselves, or posterity, is highly unjustifiable; of ourselves, because we cannot ensure to any distant period even our survival, to taste the blessings which we are in pursuit of; and in the midst of our care and solicitude may realize in our own case, the parable of the rich man, who while he congratulated himself that "he had much goods laid up for him for many years," was suddenly assailed with the awful assurance of, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be re-

“ quired of thee ;” and of our posterity, because that it implies a mistrust of Providence, and an apprehension that his goodness will not be equally extended to them as to others ; which moreover betrays such a lurking spirit of vanity and self-conceit, inducing us to suppose that we more particularly deserve to be favoured than others do, as is entirely inconsistent with Christian charity and moderation.

And now, my brethren, having considered the subject of my text in a general and particular light, give me leave to suggest to you two short reflections, which naturally arise from it, with an immediate relation to our practice.

Let us compare, in the first place, the different interests which we are authorized as Christians, to take in the concerns of our spiritual and earthly nature. In the advancement of the former, we see that there are no bounds prescribed to our ambition ; we are commanded even to aspire after a rivalry with the bright inhabitants of heaven ; but in promoting the welfare of the latter, we are directed to pray
only

only for our daily bread ; and the reasonableness of this distinction will be evident to us, if we consider the superiority of the soul over the body, and the consequent propriety of giving that, in every instance, the preference to this ; while we abide in the flesh, its wants and necessities must be attended to, our Lord therefore, who was about to impose a “ yoke ” that was “ easy,” and a “ burden ” that was “ light,” has impowered us to remember them in our supplications to Heaven ; but this we can do, after that we have addressed our most ardent petitions for the support of our spiritual life ; “ the meat and drink of “ this,” we know, “ is to do the will of “ God ;” and by how much is it more glorious, and more advantageous to our real and best interests, to do that will, than “ to labour for the meat that perisheth,” by so much the stronger should our attachments be, and so much the more assiduous our endeavours, in favour of the one than of the other.

Lastly, let us remember, that in praying to our heavenly Father, to “ give us our daily
“ bread,”

“bread,” we acknowledge his care to extend to the most minute concerns of our life, and our own inability to provide for them, without his assistance; hence the petition we have been examining, enhances our obligation to him, and convinces us of the propriety of the apostle’s observation, that, “whether we eat or drink, all should be done “to the glory of God.” And, indeed, if the most prosperous of us all, whose present circumstances promise the fairest for our commanding every comfort of life, would advert, first, to the obtaining and the preserving of external blessings, and then to their natural fragility and obnoxiousness to diminution and destruction, we should find that the very bread, which daily ministers to our support, reads a lesson of gratitude to God, which is unintelligible to none but the ignorant, the careless, and the abandoned. Thrice happy is he, who, being duly persuaded of the universality of his obligations to him, has established as universal a system of obedience and submission! who, discerning his loving-kindness and mercy, at every moment, in every incident

incident of his life, has at length acquired that temper and disposition of mind, which distinguished the Prophet Habbakuk's profession, "That though the fig-tree should not blossom, neither should fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive should fail, and the fields should yield no meat; the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stall, yet would he rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of his salvation."

[illegible]

DISCOURSE V.

ON THE

LORD'S PRAYER.

MATTHEW, VI. VER. 12.

DISCOURSE VI

ON THE

FORGIVENESS

MATTHEW, VI. YC. 12.

DISCOURSE V.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. VI. the 12th Verse.

*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our
debtors.*

THE first part of the Lord's Prayer which we have already considered, concerned the spiritual interests of the church in general, as the kingdom of God. The maintenance of its individual members, petitioning as inhabitants of this lower world, was then interceded for; and now their spiritual necessities, are represented as the objects of divine mercy, which is addressed in the language of humility and contrition towards God, and of charity and benevolence towards mankind.

The

The passage of which my text is composed, is evidently devisible into two parts :

Ist. The petition made, “ forgive us our debts ;” and

IIdly. The condition on which we expect that it will be granted, “ as we forgive our debtors.”

I. Then, to examine the nature of the petition, “ forgive us our debts.” St. Luke has put it beyond a doubt, what those debts are, which we owe to God, by telling us in the parallel passage, that they are our sins. It is needless to enlarge upon the application of the term debts to our sins; it being a sufficient justification of the comparison to say, that they are so far debts, as they involve us in manifold deficiencies in the discharge of our bounden duty to God, and render us obnoxious to a penalty in consequence, from the personal suffering of which, nothing but the free grace and goodness of God can exempt us; since, in the nature of things, we can have no substitute to propose, who may procure our acquittal, by assuming our burden: nothing then remains to the ruined debtor, than

The petition, then, we find, contains a declaration of our obnoxiousness to punishment, and of our need of the forgiveness of God.

The fatal experience of every man, cannot fail to convince him of his being of the number of the sinful. Every sin we know is necessarily and intrinsically a transgression of some positive or moral ordinance of God; which he, as the Creator and Governor of the world, must have the most undoubted right to punish, as an act of rebellion against his authority. The sinner therefore in point of merit, must have for ever forfeited all hope of the divine favour. 'He may repent,' you will say, but there is nothing in the nature of repentance to authorize us to suppose that the crime of yesterday can be expiated by the
f contrition

contrition of to-day. The last refuge, then, to which he must fly, is to the mercy of God, disposing him to forgive the sins of his creatures, who repent having committed them, and strive to amend their conduct in future. Our title to forgiveness, then, we find does not lie in the value of repentance, but in the acceptance of it by God, who has been pleased to reveal himself to us, in the amiable character of a God of mercy, loving-kindness, long-suffering, and compassion. This is the ground-work upon which is built that grand superstructure of redemption and salvation by Jesus Christ; which his blessed gospel has so clearly exhibited, and so liberally offered to all who turn to him with lively faith, sincere repentance, and steady purposes of amendment, carried into execution to the utmost of their abilities and endeavours. Perfect obedience is expected of none of us; fallible and defective, we must at any rate be. Our Saviour has shewn us, that the best of men are so, in having commanded all his disciples to pray for the daily forgiveness of their sins. That petition we must however remark, refers
only

only to the infirmities and frailties of human nature, which imperceptibly occurs every moment of our lives, and can therefore be only generally confessed and deplored; but in the case of heinous and presumptuous crimes, which mark the characters of the wicked, it prescribes indeed, but does not perform the duty which they render especially incumbent. Some more solemn act of humiliation and repentance, and some additional trial of the reality of the change of his principles and practices must be undergone, before such a sinner can have within himself any satisfactory hope or assurance of pardon. Offences of so deep a dye, it is to be hoped, are not among our daily trespasses; and therefore call for the atonement of more than our daily acknowledgments and supplications. An effort correspondent to the deviation must be made, and no trifling one, in itself, we may be assured, since in the petition before us, we are instructed to pray for the forgiveness of those sins which escape from us, more through the depravity of our nature, than the corruption of our wills. The sum then of our petition is

briefly this: ‘ A general confession of our pro-
 ‘ penalty to ill, and of the wretchedness of our
 ‘ spiritual condition, so far as it depends upon
 ‘ ourselves; and an appeal to the mercies and
 ‘ forbearance of God, who having “ so loved
 “ the world, as to give his only begotten Son,
 “ to the end that we should not perish, but
 “ have everlasting life,” has thereby cove-
 ‘ nanted to forgive the repentant offender,
 ‘ and will therefore forgive us, who sincerely
 ‘ repent of all our faults, and testify our re-
 ‘ pentance, by bringing forth the fruits of it,
 ‘ in a better life.’

And this brings me to my
 Ild head, which respected the condition on
 which we may expect our petition will be
 granted; “ As we forgive our debtors.”

We have already observed, that repentance
 to be accepted, must be followed by amend-
 ment; and indeed, if we reflect for a mo-
 ment, we shall find that this is requiring the
 most reasonable test of its sincerity: for we
 cannot properly be said to be sorry for sins
 past, when we do not forsake the practice of
 them; when we are not in the disposition of
 persons

persons really penitent, and desirous to be forgiven, who will naturally seek every opportunity of regaining the favour of God, and imitating his perfections as a natural step to it.

Of this imitation, one principal part is the forgiving of others, in like manner as God has forgiven us: I say in like manner; because that when we revert to the nature of our obligations to God, and of the obligations of our fellow creatures to us, we shall find it impossible for us to forgive one another in the degree in which he forgives us. After the most assiduous conduct we can adopt, in obedience to his commands, we shall find that our debts to him, compared with the trespasses of mankind against us, have been very aptly represented by our blessed Saviour, as ten thousand talents in respect of one hundred pence. We can therefore only be said to forgive, as we are forgiven, by forgiving sincerely, by forgiving immediately, and by forgiving repeatedly: i. e. according to the gospel precepts on the subject, “from the heart,” by “not suffering the sun to

“go down upon our wrath,” but daily forgiving, as we daily pray to be forgiven, even though our brother should sin against us, “more than seventy times seven.” It is in these instances only that we can compare our forgiveness with that of God; for what are the highest provocations we can sustain from each other, in proportion to the aggravated offences, with which we have insulted the majesty, authority, and goodness of God. Whatever motives too, we may have, for being enraged with, and revenging ourselves upon our brother, they must be inferior to the many which we have, to love him, and to promote his good; whereas, in the case of God and us, the distance is so infinite between the Creator and the creature, that it is impossible for the latter to merit the regard and attention of the former; so that an offence committed against him, stands without any one circumstance to counterbalance and palliate its guilt; nay, is always deepened by the reflection that it has been offered, notwithstanding the most gratuitous kindness and benevolence, which ought to have induced,
and

and ever commanded a directly contrary conduct. These are considerations which abundantly shew the justice and even the mildness of the condition, on which alone we can hope for the benefits of his mercy; a condition which our Lord has defined in the clearest terms, by assuring us, (at the conclusion of his parable of the king taking account of his servants, and most severely punishing one of them, for cruelty and unkindness to a fellow servant) that “so likewise should his heavenly Father do also unto us, if we from our hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”

But here may be asked; ‘Is it not plain from all that you have urged, that the forgiveness of our sins by God, depends solely on our forgiving them that trespass against us, without any of the conditions of repentance and amendment which you have annexed to it?’—To this it may be answered, that the forgiveness of injuries founded on the conviction of the necessity of God’s forgiving us, must carry with it such a sense of human infirmity, and of divine goodness,

as naturally to lead to the establishment of true religion in our minds, affections, and actions; and therefore virtually to include the whole circle of gospel-duties, as comprehensively as those of charity and placability; which are for this reason, particularly mentioned to shew how essential they are to Christian virtue, and Christian happiness. Love, we know, is the grand characteristic of our religious profession, and therefore we are not to wonder that the forgiveness of injuries should be pre-eminently considered, as necessary to our obtaining its privileges.

It is to be observed, that this petition does not exclude the detection and punishment of criminals, and wrong doers, in a judicial, or even a private capacity. The conduct which it prohibits, is that which is undertaken and pursued upon principles of personal revenge and resentment; for evil and not for good; for motives, which of all others, we most fear to be retaliated upon ourselves, and which, however prone to be led by them, we are ashamed of avowing, and uneasy under the imputation.

We have now seen how closely connected
our

our future hopes are with our present demeanor. We have seen the infinite importance of divine forgiveness to our welfare, and how dependant the obtaining of it is upon our forgiving, in our turn, the offences which human frailty may occasion our fellow creatures to commit against us. Is it then possible that beings, whose condition, without divine grace, is so desperately dangerous, should abandon the last refuge it affords them, and relinquish every hope of pardon, to gratify the mean passions of anger and resentment. Passions which, at best, can furnish but the pleasure of a brute, for the moment of their delirium; and which are sure to be succeeded by anguish and remorse here, and by everlasting misery hereafter:—but this is not all; we should recollect that we pray for forgiveness upon the very terms of forgiving others. If therefore we act directly contrary to those terms, do we not voluntarily devote ourselves to almighty vengeance, and change a petition for mercy into the bitterest imprecations against ourselves, and the most emphatic entreaty that he would not forgive us?

These

These reflections should daily occur to our minds, as we address the words of my text to "Our Father who is in heaven;" and if any motives, short of moral compulsion, can have any influence upon them, must gradually infix that charity of disposition, which, in our Saviour, dictated every sentiment, and animated every action of his life; and which his dying exhortations bequeathed to his disciples, as the pledge of their fidelity to him, and the indispensable requisite for their obtaining his favour, and the inestimable rewards of his kingdom of righteousness, peace, and love.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE VI.

ON THE

LORD'S PRAYER.

MATTHEW, VI. Ver. 13.

DISCOVERED

THE FIRST OF

DISCOURSE VI.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. VI. the 13th Verse.

*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us
from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the
power, and the glory, for ever and ever,
Amen.*

THE last clause of the Lord's Prayer which we have been considering, having implored forgiveness for the past, our Lord, in the subsequent petition, directs us to pray, that God would be pleased to preserve us from sin for the time to come; "Lead us
" not into temptation, but deliver us from
" evil."

The first enquiry to which these words would lead us, is into the nature of the temptation into which we beseech our heavenly Father not to lead us.

In the language of Scripture, the word temptation implies a double sense—"a trial of
"virtue,"—"and a seduction to sin."

Our present condition, we are taught to regard as a state of probation, to which it is evident that some trials of virtue are essentially necessary. With a view to these, the Scripture tells us, that "God tempted Abraham" with the command of sacrificing his son, to illustrate and confirm his faith and obedience by bringing them to a test, which should extend no farther than to the intention of the deed; and in the same sense the Jewish historian tells us, that "in the wilderness God
"proved Israel, to know what was in their
"heart, whether they would keep his com-
"mandments or no." Not that in these cases, God does not know before, how men will conduct themselves, but that he may give them, who have in themselves any root or principle of virtue, an opportunity of bringing forth the fruits of it, that they may be exercised, approved, and made manifest to the world here, and to men and angels hereafter, and to be in themselves improved, established,

established, and fitted for heaven. This was the motive of trying the Israelites by temptations, as it is of sending them to any of the sons of men, who in this world are preparing for the next. These trials are themselves their preparation, and when they are applied, according to the intention of God, and consistently with the means which his grace affords, of turning them to their advantage, will constitute their everlasting felicity.—“The trial of our faith,” we are assured by one apostle, “is much more precious than
“of gold that perisheth;” and by another, that “blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive
“the crown of life.” It is with reference to these glorious promises and assurances, that we are encouraged and exhorted to “count
“it all joy when we fall into divers temptations;” not however when at a distance from us, but when they have been already experienced, and in a great measure overcome; for as to temptations in general, to which we are yet to look forwards, the danger of which we know as certainly as we are ignorant

ignorant of our success in resisting them. Our Lord teaches us to pray that we “may not be led into them;” the frailty of our nature, the violence of our passions, and the corruptions of our will, rendering it much more consistent with the dictates of prudence and humility to avoid, than to encounter temptations, in every case where the alternative is left to our own choice.

With respect to this primary sense of temptations, as immediately coming from God, specifically for our advantage, applied to the petition in my text, we may beseech him not to lead us into them, upon principles most truly Christian—from an humble consciousness of our own weakness, and want of divine assistance, entreating him “not to tempt us above what we are able,” or at least, “with the temptation to make a way for us to escape.”

In the second signification of temptations, namely, in that of seductions to sin, we are bound to confess with St. James, that as God “cannot be tempted with evil,” so, “neither tempteth He any man.” He deceives, He seduces

seduces no man, but "every man is tempted, "when he is drawn away by his own lust, "and enticed;" that lust giving the devil a power over our minds, which his diabolical attempts could never otherwise attain to.

These temptations then are his snares, which he lays to entangle us in sin, and bring us to ruin, and which are directly opposed to the temptations before described, inasmuch as they are designed to betray and destroy the virtue which those are intended to illustrate and confirm; from them, therefore, we more especially pray that we may be preserved.

But here it may be asked, 'Can we intreat 'God not to lead us into such temptations as 'we attribute to the devil?' To this very important question we must reply, by observing, that in Scripture, God is very often said to do a thing which he permits to be done; thus he is said to have "moved David to number "Israel and Judah," when the action was so guilty an one as to incur his severest displeasure and punishment; and to have "hardened "Pharaoh's heart," though the consequences of it involved his whole kingdom in calamity

and desolation. In such cases we cannot suppose that God actually and efficiently does these things, but that he only permits them, by suffering the devil to exert a temporary power over the objects of his indignation, and withdrawing the influence of his grace, for the punishment of dispositions to evil, which were previously entertained by an unwarrantable and wanton perversion of the will, against the many motives and incitements to virtue, which it had long afforded them without effect. In the instance of David, we know that there never was a man who had more reason than he had, by his own confession, to mistrust the arm of flesh, and to place his entire confidence in the God of Israel; divine grace had been moving him all his life long, not to do any thing which could contradict these convictions, and therefore, at the particular juncture referred to, we may justly conclude that the turpitude of the action of numbering the people was entirely his own, and that God had no more to do with the occasioning of it, than as he left his ungrateful servant to his own errors, and to the malice of Satan, who,

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in the book of Chronicles, is expressly said * to “have stood up against Israel,”—“and provoked David to number Israel;” and in the case of Pharoah, if ever the most undeniable proofs of the divine will, and the most solemn and palpable warnings of the consequences of disobeying it, can have weight and authority with the human mind, one would think that the miracles and exhortations of Moses, and the plagues of Egypt, must have given him every opportunity of repentance and amendment, which even the divine mercy and long suffering could afford to an obstinate and perverse offender, they were all however lost upon him. The Scripture tells us, that † “he hardened his heart,” himself, repeatedly, against the judgments and commands of God, and therefore most justly deserved to be virtually hardened by him, in being left to the increasing blindness and insensibility of his mind, unrestrained and unenlightened by farther vi-

* 1 Chron. xxi. 1. God is said to have moved David.
2 Sam. xxiv. 1, where see the marginal antecedent to the relative he.

† Exod. viii. 15. Ib. 32.

sitations of grace, and to be no longer considered in any other view than as a memorable instance of the power and vengeance of God, exerted against the incorrigible sinner, who presumes to set them at defiance*. In like manner God is here said, impliedly, to lead us into temptation, not by any immediate act of his own, but by giving the devil a permission to exert his baleful influence upon our minds, and by withholding from them that restraining and assisting grace which is so essential to their security from his attacks; this we may be assured, that he never does, unless we have forfeited every pretension to his mercies, by a series of criminal conduct, which has resisted all the advances of his Blessed Spirit, and rendered as morally incapable of being profited by his suggestions. In such cases, he gives us over to a reprobate mind, and so far leads into temptation as he does not protect us from it, or strengthen us under it, in the hour of dan-

* See Exod. ix. 13—19. This very declaration was a merciful warning to him of what was about to befall him and his people, which he was no doubt at liberty to avert by a change of conduct.

ger and distress. Without his permission we know that the powers of darkness cannot prevail against us; nay, we are assured from the records of Scripture, that upon a memorable occasion they could not enter even into a herd of swine, until the consent of our Saviour had been previously obtained, much less can we suppose that they may wreck at pleasure their licentious fury upon those of his creatures, whom he has honoured so highly as to take their nature upon him. "Simon," said he, to one of his disciples, whose denial of him he clearly foresaw, and benevolently forgave, as a weakness of the flesh, rather than an alienation of the spirit, "Simon, Simon," said he, "behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

These gracious intercessions of the Son of God, we may depend, are perpetually offered up for all his disciples, who, like Peter, are ready to atone for their transgressions by a speedy and sincere repentance; and we may farther depend that they are never offered in

vain. Against these, how ineffectual must the endeavours of Satan be, to lead us into temptation ! how harmless his assaults when “ we have ” such “ an advocate with the “ Father, as Jesus Christ the Righteous,” that only begotten Son of his Love, whom he sent into the world, “ to the end that all “ who believe in him, should not perish, but “ have everlasting life.”

In this sense then of the word temptation, as referable to the wiles of the devil, seducing us to sin, we understand by the petition, that God would not lead us into temptation, that he would not suffer us to be led into them to our injury ; but by his providence either preserve us from the hour of temptation, or by his gracious support, extricate us from it, when actually come upon us ; and this seems to be more particularly our Lord’s meaning from the tenor of the succeeding clause, “ but “ deliver us from evil ; ” which, whether we intend by the word evil, the evil of temptation, namely, the sins we incur in consequence of it, or that malicious spirit of darkness, who is pre-eminently stiled the Evil One, and

and with respect to his dealings towards mankind, the Tempter. In either sense, I say, the clause seems to determine the import of the temptations against which we are praying, to be occasions to sin, more than trials of virtue; such as lead to evil, and proceed from the Evil One, whom we can only oppose and overcome, through the deliverance which is wrought for us by our heavenly Father; who suffers him to exert his diabolical arts no farther than to carry on his system of probation, and his judicial power over the world; against the good, as an exercise of their virtue, and a step to their reward; and against the wicked as a proof of their guilt, and a confirmation of their punishment. In this view of the petition, what a striking argument do we obtain of the omnipotence of God, who thus makes even Satan himself the unwilling instrument of his government, and his most atrocious designs of rebellion and opposition against his will conducive to its original and peculiar purposes!

Most properly then does our Lord conclude

his prayer with a solemn acknowledgment of the transcendency of his nature and attributes, expressed in the latter part of my text, “for
“thine is the kingdom, and the power, and
“the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.” As if he had said, ‘To thee, most gracious and
‘most bountiful Father of the universe, do
‘we thus address our petitions for the relief
‘of all our wants, knowing that thou art as
‘able as willing to interpose thy effectual assistance in our relief;—“for thine is the
“kingdom, and the power, and the glory.”
‘Thine the kingdom of nature and grace,
‘thine the power over the material and spiritual creation, “of whom, and to whom, are
“all things;”—to whom therefore most
‘rightfully belongs all the glory which from
‘thee is reflected over all thy wondrous
‘works; thine too, they are in a sense peculiarly appropriated to thyself; thine everlastingly, thine originally, ultimately, and independently on any: others have kingdoms,
‘but thy kingdom “ruleth over all;” others
‘have power, but derived from thee; others
“have

“ have glory, but all terminating in thy glory.
“ They shall perish, but thou shalt endure;
“ they all shall wax old, as doth a garment,
“ and as a vesture shalt thou change them,
“ and they shall be changed, but thou art
“ the same, and thy years shall not fail.”

And now, having pursued our Lord's Prayer to the conclusion of it, it may not be amiss to take a summary review of it's parts combined.

In this survey of it, we find that it breathes the purest spirit of charity, humility, contrition, devotion, and gratitude, that it is possible to conceive or express; beginning with the most interesting and endearing compellation of the Deity, its first petition concerns the interests of the kingdom of God, and the church at large, in preference to the consideration of every private want, however urgent and great; the necessities of our human nature are then modestly alluded to; while we request them to be relieved in the most moderate and rational degree. Our sins are next called to remembrance, and interceded for,
upon

upon the amiable consideration of our forgiving all the injuries which we sustain from our fellow-creatures. Our proneness to farther transgressions is also acknowledged, and the need in which we thence stand of his preventing and assisting grace, to prevent us from falling a prey to sin and Satan; and having offered up our petitions, not as unconnected, selfish individuals, but as loving members of one indissoluble community, we conclude with one common declaration of his right to our homage, reverence and gratitude, as concentrating in himself all that can excite, command, and reward the obedience of his creatures.

Such, my beloved brethren, is the petition which we are directed daily to address to the throne of grace. After all that has been already said on the subject, I trust that ye are already fully possessed of its important contents, so closely connected with your nearest and best interests; permit me, however, to enforce my preceding observations with one short exhortation by way of conclusion. Remember, that

that if ye would pray as Christ's disciples, ye must live like them ; and that your use of his form of prayer, however frequent, and however solemn, will be neither pleasing to him, nor profitable to yourselves, unless it be ratified and confirmed by the essential amen of a conscience, and a conduct, void of offence toward God, and toward man.

that he would give us Christ's disciples, to
 must live like them; and that your life of his
 form of prayer, however frequent, and how-
 ever solemn, will be neither pleasing to him,
 nor profitable to yourselves, unless it be in-
 firmed and confirmed by the essential union of a
 conscience, and a conduct, void of offence to-
 ward God, and toward man.

DISCOURSE VII.

DISCOURSE VII.

ON THE

MARRIAGE SUPPER.

MATTHEW, XXII. Ver. 14.

DISCOURSE VII.

ON THE

MARRIAGE SUPPER.

MATTHEW, XXII. Ver. 14.

DISCOURSE VII.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. xxii. the 14th Verse.

For many are called, but few are chosen.

THESE words, which occur more than once in the course of our Saviour's discourses, were in this particular passage used by him to conclude his parable of the marriage supper, given by a king in honour of his son; representing, by very lively and expressive images, the preaching of the gospel, first to the Jews; their national rejection of it, and national punishment in this world; and the propagation of its glad tidings to the Gentiles afterwards, and the reception it would meet with among them, from unworthy individuals who should externally profess it; and
the

the spiritual and eternal punishment which would await them in another world.

The general scheme then of the parable, gives us a very comprehensive idea of the extensive beneficence of the gospel, as well as the indispensable requisites on the part of man, for the obtaining a share in it, notwithstanding its being amply sufficient to promote and constitute the happiness of the whole human race. We cannot, therefore, but be highly interested in the subject, and not unprofitably employed in considering it.

“The kingdom of Heaven,” said our Lord,
 “is like unto a certain king, which made a
 “marriage for his son, and sent forth his
 “servants to call them that were bidden to
 “the wedding, and they would not come.
 “Again, he sent forth other servants, say-
 “ing, Tell them which are bidden, Behold
 “I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and
 “my fatlings are killed, and all things are
 “ready; come unto the marriage. But they
 “made light of it, and went their ways; one
 “to his farm, another to his merchandize;
 “and the remnant took his servants, and en-
 “treated

“ treated them spitefully, and slew them. But
“ when the king heard thereof, he was wroth ;
“ and sent forth his armies and destroyed
“ those murderers, and burned up their city.
“ Then saith he to his servants, The wedding
“ is ready, but they which were bidden, were
“ not worthy. Go ye, therefore, into the
“ highways, and as many as ye shall find,
“ bid to the marriage. So these servants went
“ out into the highways, and gathered toge-
“ ther all, as many as they found, both bad
“ and good ; and the wedding was furnished
“ with guests. And when the king came in
“ to see the guests, he saw there a man which
“ had not on a wedding garment ; and he saith
“ unto him, Friend, how camest thou in here,
“ not having a wedding garment ? And he
“ was speechless. Then said the king to the
“ servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take
“ him away, and cast him into outer dark-
“ ness, there shall be weeping and gnashing
“ of teeth. For many are called, but few are
“ chosen.”

The comparison of the gospel covenant
with a marriage feast given by a king in ho-

nour of his son, we shall find to be extremely just and accurate. When we recollect that those exceeding great rewards, and those celestial and immortal joys, which it holds forth to all true believers, are procured to us through the merits of the Son of God, collectively to all, in consequence of his own active and perfect obedience, and individually to particulars, through the co-operation of his gracious spirit; strengthening our weak, but sincere endeavours, and enabling them to be acceptable in the sight of God; not to say, that the church being frequently in Scripture denominated the spouse of Christ, the history of the privileges which have been obtained to the members of it by Christ, may very properly be represented by the delights of a marriage feast. These privileges, in conformity with the original scheme of Providence, were first offered to the Jews; to that nation which had long been invited and bidden into the service of their Maker, with peculiar exertions of mercy and benevolence. The labours of John the Baptist, of Christ himself, and of his apostles and disciples, were assidu-

ously,

ously, though unsuccessfully employed, to engage them to accept of the gospel terms of salvation; and served in general, only to bring upon them the scorn, derision, and contempt of their nation, and often the most cruel treatment, persecution, and death, from the hand of those, whom they were laying under the greatest obligations, by tendering the most generous and advantageous offers that could possibly be made to mankind. Such heinous offences could not be committed, without incurring the heaviest punishments; and accordingly they ended in the final destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the most dreadful slaughter and dispersion of the Jewish nation, which were prevented only by a miracle from proving their total annihilation. Their disobedience and perverseness did not, however, stop the gracious intentions of God towards mankind in general. The Gentile world, those spiritual vagrants, who were idly loitering along the highways, after deserting the service of their Lord and Master, were now invited to accede to the duties and blessings of the gos-

pel, which they had as little right to aspire after, as the guests of the royal feast, who were assembled promiscuously, from the lowest and most worthless ranks and conditions of men, to obtain that signal honour; most inexcusably therefore, were any, the slightest objections made by such against complying with the conditions requisite for the attainment of happiness, so transcendent and un-hoped for; yet some there were, (and many, alas! our experience convinces us, there still are,) who supposed that they might sit down to the feast of the kingdom of Heaven, without exerting any efforts of their own to appear there, worthy of the Divine Master of it. This is represented in the parable by the circumstance of a man coming in, who had not on a wedding garment. This particular deserves a moments consideration; for whereas we might, at first sight, think it unreasonable, that the man who was suddenly called in from the high-way by the summons of his king, should be expected to be cloathed in a wedding garment, suited to the pomp and splendor of the occasion; we shall be undeceived by

by recollecting, that as one of the instances of ancient magnificence was the having a great variety of rich habits continually in store, it is agreeable to the analogy of the times in which our Saviour lived, to suppose that the wedding garment which the unworthy guest was required to appear in, had previously been furnished him, by the master of the feast; and that it was therefore through perverseness and self-will, and not through necessity, that he neglected to put it on. This remark corresponds moreover perfectly with the nature of the gospel offers, either considered as made to the world at large, or to each of its inhabitants. The general tender of it to mankind was made solely from the free grace and favour of God; and those requisitions which are exacted of individuals as necessary to its being appropriated to them, are accompanied with the promise of the effectual aid of the Holy Spirit, to render the performance of them perfectly easy and practicable; so that whenever God shall demand of us, as the king in the parable enquired of his guest, how can we presume to appear in his

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presence

presence without a wedding garment, cloathed in the filth and rags of unregenerate nature, and without the white robe of inward purity and holiness; we shall be like him, speechless and confounded; and anticipate by our self-condemnation the dreadful sentence which shall banish us into the horrid regions of eternal misery and punishment. This case, unpardonable as it is on the side of man, our Lord has assured us, will too often be realized in the Christian world; for that though many are called to the blessings of his kingdom, yet that few will demean themselves, so as to be chosen to partake of them.

Having explained the parable to which my text is annexed, I proceed to consider the meaning of the text itself, and the practical use which may be made of it;—but previously to this, I propose

Ist. To invalidate the meaning sometimes affixed to it, by which the choice, as well as the calling of God, is considered as a mere act of his will, by shewing that it is highly derogatory from the wisdom and goodness of God, and totally inconsistent with the tenor of the parable to which it is affixed; and then,

Illy.

II. I shall proceed to ascertain its true meaning, and to make such a practical use of it as the subject will admit of.

I. It has been supposed by some, that our Saviour having declared that many are called, but few are chosen, has intimated thereby, that though God may have vouchsafed to call many to the knowledge of the gospel, he has nevertheless, by a secret decree determined to choose only a few to the enjoyment of its privileges. A tenet which destroys itself by its inconsistency and impiety. If such a choice had previously taken place, the call would be absolutely nugatory, and such as an all-wise and all-gracious God could never have authorized; for it would be useless to call men to the knowledge of the gospel, and to exhort them to a compliance with its precepts, under the sanction of positive rewards and punishments, when they were before incapacitated from being affected by the one or the other, being either predestinated to be happy or miserable, independantly of their obedience or disobedience of them : and surely we may add, that to those who were unfortunately doomed

to misery, it would be cruel to hold out rewards which they could never obtain, however sincere and earnest their endeavours after them might be, or which they were prevented from aspiring after by their ardor being chilled, and their efforts weakened, in order that they might be rendered unfruitful and inadequate.

From this general answer to the false interpretation of my text we have been considering, we may proceed to offer another particular one, from the nature of the parable to which it is annexed. We therein find, that the guest who was excluded from the pleasures of the marriage feast was not upon a footing of merit with those who were permitted to enjoy them, but was guilty of a fault of wilful and perverse obstinacy; which was a real obstacle to his partaking in their privileges. As this then is the supposed fact from which the conclusion in my text is drawn, we have every possible reason to believe that the choice of the few will depend upon the manner in which they avail themselves of the call given to the many; and therefore every
opinion

opinion which attributes it to the absolute will and determination of God, uninfluenced by the conduct of the chosen, is as false as it is absurd and impious.

And this brings me

II^{dly}. To the consideration of the true meaning of my text, and to the suggestion of such reflections as naturally arise from the subject.

The true meaning of my text, in conformity with the spirit of the parable to which it belongs, is this:—That the mere profession of Christianity, without any of its intrinsic excellencies, will not entitle us to its privileges. The unworthy guest had obeyed the summons of the king as readily as any of the rest; and therefore, to a superficial beholder, might have appeared to be equally deserving of favour; but to the penetrating eye of his master, he wanted the great requisite which could alone obtain him a share in his beneficence; he wanted something which it is plain that he might have possessed, for he was punished for the deficiency. Something in like manner is expected on our part, to procure

us the rewards of that heavenly kingdom to which we pretend to belong; something which we may attain to, and which we shall be punished for being defective in, by the same hand which was prepared to shower down blessings upon us. Ere we approach its sacred limits we must lay aside the garments we have worn on the highway of this fallen world—that corrupt, depraved nature, whose inclinations, dispositions, and tendencies are directly opposite to that regenerated mind—the wedding garment of our Lord, which can alone admit us to the marriage of his Son; otherwise, our being baptized in the name of Christ, and our external observance of the ordinances of his gospel, will no more give us a place in his kingdom, than the apparent obedience of the perverse guest to the call of his royal master, entitled him to a seat at his table. We must not think to shelter ourselves in the practice of sin, under the imputed righteousness and merits of our Saviour, without striving to imitate the bright example he has set us. Of ourselves, indeed, we can do nothing; but then we may be assured, that

that his assistance is never wanting to those who sincerely wish to do right, and who are anxious to be instructed in the due performance of it. Powerful as the bias is, which we all of us have to wrong, yet there is something perpetually stirring within us, which will infallibly preserve us from error, if we will but attend to its whispers. The more we resign up our will to its direction, the more loudly and effectually will it remonstrate on every succeeding occasion; not only because that the influence of corrupt nature will, by resistance, be gradually diminished, but because we have been taught by our blessed Saviour, that those who cast themselves on his mercy, and who strive, by listening to their internal monitor, to obtain greater assistances, shall be favoured with bountiful communications of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen them under temptation, to comfort them in misfortune, and to lead them to the knowledge and practice of every necessary truth. It is only under this guidance, that we can ever lead the life of Christians, without which we cannot promise ourselves the privileges of them. Regeneration, which in Scripture,
we

we see so often urged upon us by Christ and his apostles, as essentially necessary to our being his disciples, is not a mere name, but a real change which must take place in our spiritual condition, to fit us for the society and happiness of heaven: a change which cannot be the work of a moment, but must gradually be accomplished by successive and unremitted efforts, involving labours which cannot be too soon begun, and which can never be remitted with safety on this side the grave. The best of us have much more to correct than we can ever entirely remove; and therefore have need of all our industry and activity, to forward the business of reformation as far as possible: and at every step we take toward the period of this life of probation, we should recollect that though many be called, yet few will be chosen; and that we should then unweariedly persist in working out our salvation with fear and trembling, lest, after all, our manifold deficiencies should exclude us from the number of the blessed. The parable we have been considering, clearly defines the foundation of our hopes, with respect

spect to the kingdom of Heaven; we cannot be inhabitants of it without the wedding garment; it is indeed God's, and he has accordingly furnished us all with it; but the putting it on, which he positively requires of us, must be our own act; the case is plain, and has been most accurately laid open to our view by our blessed Lord himself, who will hereafter be our Judge, as he has been before our Saviour; and in that capacity, we may be certain that he will consider every warning he has given us of the folly and danger of sin, as an heavy aggravation of our guilt, and consequently of our punishment. At present we have an opportunity of profiting by them all; and of redeeming the time we have hitherto lost or mispent; how long it may continue it is not for us to determine. This at least we are sure of, that it will not always be in our power, and must, sooner or later, be irrecoverably lost. Death is a visitant we should be every moment prepared to receive; and his summons will be an awful prelude to judgment; then will the many who have been called, whether by the still small
voice

voice of conscience, or the more authoritative accents of revelation, be assembled before the throne of the Lord, to be convinced at last, how few of their number will then be chosen by him. Let us suppose ourselves at this moment in such a situation; and let us now determine to do, what we should then wish we had done; and let us implore our heavenly Father to assist and strengthen our resolutions, that, being fruitful in good living, they may obtain us an inheritance among that peculiar people, whom his blessed Son, having purified to himself, will hereafter reward in his everlasting kingdom of glory above.

DISCOURSE VIII.

ON THE

TEN VIRGINS.

MATTHEW, XXV. Ver. 1, 2.

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IV. 1903

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STATISTICAL, XV, Vol. 1, 2.

DISCOURSE VIII.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. xxv. the 1st and 2d Verses.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom; and five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

THE verses which have been read to you are the beginning of a parable, delivered by our Lord, to describe the different conduct of the subjects of the kingdom of heaven, or the members of his church, under similar circumstances, and the consequences which would result from it to themselves, in the awards they would receive from the hand of their Lord and Master.

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven,” said he, “be likened unto ten virgins, which
i “took

“ took their lamps, and went forth to meet
“ the bridegroom; and five of them were
“ wise, and five were foolish. They that
“ were foolish, took their lamps, and took
“ no oil with them; but the wise took oil
“ in their vessels with their lamps. While
“ the bridegroom tarried, they all flumbered
“ and slept; and at midnight there was a cry
“ made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go
“ ye out to meet him. Then all those vir-
“ gins arose, and trimmed their lamps; and
“ the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of
“ your oil, for our lamps are gone out. But
“ the wise answered, saying, Not so, lest
“ there be not enough for us and you; but
“ go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for
“ yourselves. And while they went to buy,
“ the bridegroom came; and they that were
“ ready went in with him to the marriage, and
“ the door was shut. Afterwards came also
“ the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open
“ to us! But he answered and said, Ve-
“ rily, verily, I say unto you, I know you
“ not. Watch ye, therefore, for ye know nei-
“ the the day, nor the hour, when the Son
“ of Man cometh.”

It

It seems to have been an ancient custom, observed in the celebration of Eastern marriages, for the bridegroom to conduct his bride to his house by night, which gave rise to another custom, whereby certain of his female friends were wont to wait there, in order to come out and receive them, with lighted lamps, on their way, to accompany them home. It was necessary therefore, for the compliment of their attendance to be acceptable and meritorious, that they should watch the seasonable moment of appearing with their lights, before the company actually entered the house, to share in the feast which was prepared for the bridegroom and his friends.

On these circumstances our Lord has founded the parable; ten virgins, who were designed to escort a bridegroom, on the occasion just mentioned, had resorted to his house with their lamps; five prudently secured oil for them, against the moment when they should be informed, by the foremost of his train, that he was near; the others, incautiously depending upon their having an opportunity of purchasing some in time, came, wholly unprepared for a

sudden summons: yet, notwithstanding this difference in their conduct, they were all alike surpris'd with sleep, nor did any awake until alarmed by the midnight cry of "the bride-groom cometh!" The prudent, however, were quickly ready to meet him; while the foolish, by their improvidence, lost the moment of attending him, and were shut out from his feast; the door was closed against them, and though they knocked, and entreated to be permitted to enter, they were repuls'd, as persons unworthy of his favour, after having been so remiss in the attention which they profess'd to pay him.

Having endeavour'd to set the parable in a clear light, I proceed to shew,

Ist, What the likeness is, which our Lord alludes to in my text; by comparing the several circumstances of the persons described in it, with the different modes of conduct adopted by men, in regard to their Christian profession; and

IIdly, To suggest from thence, such cautionary reflections as may be most useful to us, in our regulation of this present life, with a view to the determination of the next.

Ist. Then

Ist. There are various particulars, which will deserve to be remarked, in comparing the conduct of Christians with that of the virgins in the parable.

We are all of us expecting a Master, whose coming is certain, though the precise time of it is entirely unknown to us ; a Master, whom we are bound to love and to obey by every possible motive which can have weight with rational and spiritual beings ; who has compassionated us in the hour of distress ; who has laid down his life for our sakes ; and who, with a kindness more particularly applicable to the subject of the parable, has admitted us to the society of his church, which looks up to Him as her spiritual lord and spouse ; and if we would meet him as we ought, it must be with our lamps burning, with our hearts enlightened and invigorated with the divine life, actively operating upon, and spiritualizing them ; we must all, therefore, require the perpetual exertion of our endeavours to preserve it from being extinguished or obscured, through the corruptions of human nature, by maintaining an habitual intercourse with that Being, who,

having imparted it, can alone secure us the continuance of it : yet, alas ! there are none of us whose endeavours are unremittingly bent to that important purpose.

The spirit of this world, more or less, predominates in every individual, unnerves their vigilance, and lays their powers asleep, at some time or other, which should be better employed. Even apostles have slumbered, though their blessed Master himself had exhorted them to watch and to pray, lest they should enter into temptation : the spirit may be willing, but the flesh, in the best of us, is weak, and prone to evil. Happy is it for those whose moments of infirmity are soonest past, and who are able to preserve the principles of the divine life in their heart, though its light may not always shine with a splendour equally clear and unfulled in their actions—whose lamps burn dimly for want of trimming, and not for want of oil ! This, however, is a case which is not realised by too many of those who presumptuously lay claim to the name of Christians : habits of sin, and a rooted attachment to the world, gradually alienate

alienate them from God, and so effectually destroy every heavenly temper and disposition of mind, that they too fatally resemble those foolish virgins in the parable, which took indeed their lamps, but took no oil in them; whose external profession, blazing for a time, without having any thing intrinsic to keep it alive, must end in smother and darkness; and fail them when they have most occasion for it. Between these, therefore, and those we were before describing, there is a material difference, which is at no time so perceptible as when the notice is given that the bridegroom is coming; when the moments of some wasting sickness, and dangerous disorder, reminds them that they are mortal, and warns them to prepare for the approach of death, which will put a period to the time of their expecting their Master, and confirm the hopes or the fears, which must arise at the prospect of this alarming season; for then the Christian, whose deviations from duty have not been frequent and inveterate, turning his eyes inwardly upon himself, sees all his deficiencies, and hastens to repair them, by applying to that

well-known source of comfort from which he has so often derived support and strength : he looks up to God, whose voice he has continually heard, amid the clamours of earthly seducers and invaders, not always with equal attention, but never without reverence and awe, and renews that spiritual union with him, which, however interrupted, has at no period been entirely broken off and destroyed. His lamp, newly trimmed, shines more brightly than ever, and though he has incautiously “flumbered and slept, while the bridegroom “tarried,” he is ready, when he actually comes, to go in with him to the marriage.

Not so the idle and perverse Christian ; his lamp has gone out entirely, and when he is roused from his dead sleep, in the midst of darkness and horror, he finds himself totally destitute of every means to rekindle its extinguished light. In this hour of distress, he, perhaps, applies to some more prudent friend for consolation and assistance ; but neither is he able to obtain from him ; the oil he would borrow, he finds cannot be lent, but that it must be his own, which he should employ to replenish

replenish his lamp: all that he can then advise him to do, is to seek it by those means, which, at an earlier period, would have procured it for him. At present, however, the time of availing himself of them is past, every endeavour proves now abortive; the bridegroom comes while he is absent, and the door is shut for ever against him! When the time of probation expires with this present life, the day of grace is ended, and the sorrow, which afterwards arises, as it cannot work repentance, evidenced by amendment, must end in despair. The agonizing soul, in such a state of eternal separation from God, may, under the influence of its inbred torments, cry out, "Lord, Lord, open to me!" but if he answers at all, it will be in the repulsive terms of the parable, "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not:—' You have been ' long estranged from me, and you must ' never expect to rejoin that blissful society ' for which you are entirely disqualified!— Such a catastrophe as this, is too dreadful not to make every slumbering Christian start from his delusive sleep, and look to his lamp,
while

while yet he may preserve its glimmering light from being entirely and irrecoverably extinguished.

And this brings me,

Ildly. To suggest, from the comparison made between the circumstances of the wise and foolish virgins, and the conduct of Christians, such cautionary reflections as may be most useful to us in our regulation of this present life, with a view to the destination of the next.

1st. The first reflection which naturally arises to us, from the parable of the virgins is, the certainty of the coming of our Bridegroom, of our being removed from this world, and of our receiving in another, such a recompense as our conduct here will deserve, and that too from Him, who, having opened unto us the gates of everlasting life, will most justly punish us for causing them again to be shut upon us. Too many there are who verify the preacher's observation, that "because
" sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the
" sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

This

This, however, is the greatest practical absurdity that can be conceived; positive as the Scripture is, that it will some time, or other, overtake the wicked, and in a degree which will be, no doubt, proportionably severer, as the interval for repentance and amendment has been longer and less interrupted. This interval is more important to us than can easily be conceived by those who have not lost it: when once the door is shut, we are taught by the parable, that the criminal will sue in vain to be admitted, however ready his Lord might have been to receive him, while it was open.

2dly. The next reflection which the subject furnishes, is, the motives for humility, which are suggested to us all, from the faulty tenour of human conduct in general. The wise virgins “slumbered and slept” no less than the foolish; and the best of us are so frequently and grossly deficient in the performance of our duty, that if our dependence was to be upon our merit, and not upon the goodness of God, we must inevitably fall into condemnation. Had they presumed to boast to the
bridegroom

bridegroom of their readiness to attend him, he might with propriety have replied, remember, that, but for the "cry," which roused you from your slumber, previously to my coming, you might not have known it till it was too late to accompany me. In like manner, who of us can say that we are sufficiently upon the watch for the summons which may suddenly call us out of this world; shocking as the idea is, to every one, of our being hurried away without some previous space for recollection and repentance; and precarious, under the most favourable circumstances, as that preparation must be, which closes a thoughtless and worldly life, with the sighs and the tears, and the prayers of a death-bed sorrow?

3dly. From this reflection there arises a third, with which we shall finish the present Discourse; and that is, upon the mercy of God, in receiving us, at any rate, into favour, under the acknowledged circumstances of our flagrant unworthiness. The bridegroom, in the parable, admitted his virgin friends to the feast, though they had negligently slumbered, instead of watching for his coming; and they had

had certainly the greatest cause thankfully to acknowledge his benevolence, and to be ashamed of their own remissness. If we too compare the privileges which the gospel holds out to the sincere but imperfect disciple, with the justice of our pretensions to them, we shall have the most pregnant reason to magnify the divine love, which is so conspicuously displayed, in its having promised us blessings which we can never deserve.

From these reflections we may be led directly to the use which our Lord intended that we should derive from the parable we have been considering; and this may be summed up in a very few words; namely, to teach us the necessity of our being always prepared to meet our Lord, whenever he may be pleased to summon us to his presence, whether “at evening, or at midnight, or at “the cock-crowing in the morning;” taking particular care, not only to provide oil for our lamps, but even to do more than the wise virgins did—to keep them constantly trimmed, lest the call we receive should find us unworthy of being partakers in the blessings resulting

resulting from it ; or lest our slumbers should not be as seasonably interrupted as theirs'. If any other motive is wanting, to urge our constant preparation for this grand event of our existence, it is our entire ignorance of the time when it may reach us ; accordingly our Saviour has particularly insisted upon this circumstance, in his own moral to the parable, with which I shall conclude,—“ Watch, “ therefore, for ye know neither the day “ nor the hour when the Son of Man “ cometh.”

DISCOURSE IX.

THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN.

LUKE XVIII. Part of Ver. 14.

DISCOURS IX.

DISCOURSE IX.

ST. LUKE, Chap. xviii. Part of the 14th Verse.

*Every one that exalteth himself, shall be abased ;
and he that humbleth himself, shall be ex-
alted.*

THESE words, which occur in different passages of the Evangelists, are here the conclusion of our Saviour's parable of the Pharisee and Publican, delivered, as we are told by St. Luke, unto " certain, which " trusted in themselves that they were right- " teous, and despised others ;" and admirably descriptive of the difference between the false pretences and the true spirit of religion, which are so often confounded in the opinion and practice of the world.

“Two men,” said he, “went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee, the other a Publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself : God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers ; or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week ; I give tithes of all that I possess. And the Publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to Heaven, but smote upon his breast, crying, God be merciful to me, a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house, justified rather than the other : for every one that exalteth himself, shall be abased ; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.” There are various particulars in the course of the narration which deserve to be noticed. The scene in which it is laid, is the temple at Jerusalem ; which was a place of general resort for the paying of the devotions of all the Jewish nation, of every occupation, sect and persuasion. The persons concerned, are a Pharisee, a professor of the most formal and punctilious sect of the Jewish religion ; and a Publican,

or

or Tax-gatherer, chosen from the dregs of the people, to levy a tribute highly galling to his nation, and extorted by a foreign power. Having brought these opposite characters together in the discharge of their public duties to God, the divine historian informs us of the nature of their private addresses to him. The Pharisee, proud of his acquirements, and vain of his supposed excellence and superiority over the rest of mankind, thanks the Almighty for his being placed in an higher sphere of virtue, than the generality of his fellow creatures, and particularly than the poor Publican, whom accident had associated with him in his attendance in the temple. This apparent act of devotion, having nothing of its true spirit, was in fact, an instance of impiety, instead of religious adoration; founded on an arrogant claim to pre-eminence, it took that for granted, which it should not have conceived possible; that he had been more assiduous in spiritual pursuits than the rest of mankind, and that his assiduity had been crowned with the most extraordinary success: and how little reason he had to en-

certain such a presumptuous opinion, we may judge from the circumstances on which he grounds it. "I fast," says he, "twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess:" as if the abstaining from an innocent meal, and the dedicating a superfluous portion of a perishable good, abstractedly considered, were worthy to be named as marks of real virtue and excellence. We are not then to wonder that such a religionist as the Pharisee in the gospel was rejected, and postponed to a worshipper, who had less of the apparent practice, but more of the real spirit of devotion. The Publican, overwhelmed with the consciousness of his own unworthiness, and awed by the presence of God, in a place particularly sanctified by the prayers and sacrifices of a whole nation, in the deepest humility and self-abasement, approaches the throne of grace, with down-cast looks, and faltering voice. His heart, big with the sense of its corruptions, and fully persuaded of its inability to preserve itself from their influence, presumed not to utter any thing more than the emphatical apostrophe of "God be merciful to me
"a sinner!"

“ a sinner ! ” — As much as if he had said,
‘ O thou ! whom I am conscious that I have
‘ highly and frequently offended ; I confess,
‘ most good and gracious God ! that my
‘ transgressions are grievous and manifold :
‘ nothing can I expect from thee, but rejection
‘ and punishment ; yet sensible that I cannot
‘ find relief from the burden of my sins,
‘ from any but from thee, I prostrate my
‘ soul at thy throne, entreating thy mercy to
‘ save me from ruin, and to bring me back
‘ again from those errors which have so long
‘ alienated me from thee : now at length
‘ awakened to a sense of my dangerous condition,
‘ I feel myself tottering upon a precipice,
‘ which I can only avoid by flying unto
‘ thee. Receive me then, O Father of mercies !
‘ and accept the offering of a broken and contrite
‘ heart, which has nothing to recommend it,
‘ but the bitterest repentance for what is past,
‘ and the sincerest purposes of amendment for the future.’
All this and more, is contained in the short address of the
Publican, which had too much of the true spirit
of religion, to be otherwise than approved of

by the Saviour of mankind; who has assured us, that "this man went down to his house; justified rather than the other;" because that, as he afterwards subjoins, "every one that exalteth himself, shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted."

I purpose from the consideration of the whole parable, which concludes with my text, to shew

Ist. How consistent with the general condition of human nature, the Publican's deportment towards God appears to have been.

And therefore,

IIdly. How very unbecoming the address of the Pharisee would be in the mouth of the best of us, and how deserving, under the most favourable circumstances, of being rejected by God.

IIIdly. I shall conclude with some practical reflections on the observation in my text, that "every one that exalteth himself, shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted."

And Ist. To shew how consistent with the general

general condition of human nature was the deportment of the Publican towards God. Nothing can be more evident to every one, who has the slightest knowledge of himself, than that he is a sinner, whose sole dependance is on the mercies of God. That inherent corruption, which has been universally transmitted to the whole race of man, since the fall, has so effectually tainted every thought, principle, affection, and action, that the best of them is many degrees removed from purity and innocence. Something of self-interest, pride, partiality, or prejudice, is perpetually lurking under the surface, and debasing the composition into which it has entered. If it does not always predominate, so as to discover itself to every beholder, it is, in some degree or other, so general, that were we as inclined to declare the truth, as our consciences are sure to communicate it to ourselves, we should be forced to confess, that it was extremely difficult to say when we are free from them. We have, besides, so strange an aversion from the performance of our duty, and our omissions of it are so frequent and in-

excusable, that, upon a fair stating of the account, the balance must be greatly against us : add to this, that we are so cold and indifferent in the actual discharge of it, that the manner of its being done greatly diminishes the merit arising from the rectitude of the measure itself. Consider next, the obligations we are under to exert our utmost endeavours after righteousness, from the gracious assurances of the gospel, which has promised to accept them, short as they are of perfection, and the consequent guilt which must arise from remitting them; and which so frequently does arise from actual neglects : and when you have diligently weighed all these circumstances of demerit, ask yourselves whether we have not the greatest reason, with the Publican “ to stand afar off, and be “ unwilling to lift up so much as our eyes to “ Heaven, but smiting our breasts to cry out, “ each one of us, “ God be merciful to me a “ sinner.”

Which leads me to my
Ild head ; wherein I inferred, that the address of the Pharisee would be unbecoming in
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the mouth of the best of us, and deserving, under the most favourable circumstances, of being rejected by God. This address exhibits to us two particulars; an arrogant preference given to himself above other men; and a claim of positive merit from the tenor of his conduct. In the Pharisee, these may appear extremely heinous and unpardonable: they are not, however, sins which are peculiar to him—every one of us are more or less guilty of both continually—self-love is a ruling principle in our fallen nature, and always touches the pictures we draw of ourselves, and of others. The first it glosses over with a most deceitful colouring, which effectually misleads our judgments; the second it disfigures by the daubings of envy, and produces a result which is equally as erroneous as the former. If it should here be enquired, why self-love should be made a reason for our disparaging the characters of others, it may be answered, than an undue enhancement of our own excellencies, necessarily tends to diminish those of others; that which is taken from them in such a case, being a natural addition to ourselves;

selves ; and of this we have a practical proof in the opposite consequences which humility and self-sufficiency produce in the sentence we pass upon other men's conduct. When we think modestly of our own deserts, we are always inclined to judge charitably and favourably of theirs ; but when we are induced to adopt the conceitedness of the Pharisee, we are seldom exempted from the censoriousness which equally distinguished his address to Heaven.

And that such an address is highly unbecoming the best of us, can easily be demonstrated by appealing to every one's conscience, and then comparing the answer with the tenor of the Pharisee's prayer. With what propriety can any of us thank God for being "not as other men are," when we ourselves are not what we ought to be ?—And what possible right can we have to condemn them, when we have so much to condemn and correct in ourselves ?—Perhaps we may not be adulterers, extortioners, or flagrantly unjust ; but have we not the seeds of all those crimes in our thoughts and inclinations ? And may we
not

not have checked them, only from the fear of punishment, or the loss of reputation, fortune, and friends?—or, perhaps, because the corruptions of our hearts have discovered themselves in different tendencies and transgressions?—Vice and wickedness assume various forms, which do not all appear in the same constitution; so that the man who may boast with truth, that he is exempt from this or that crime, may be deplorably given to many others equally heinous and atrocious. And farther we are to remember, with respect to such boastings in general, and with regard to those of the Pharisee in particular, that where they are indulged, they always are accompanied with a malicious reflection glanced at some other persons, whom we suppose to be guilty of the faults from which we are clear. The Pharisee did not thank God, because he was not deserving of the imputation of adultery, extortion, and injustice, but because he was not as other men are, adulterers, extortioners, and unjust; that is, as other individuals, whom he had particularly in his mind, and who had already undergone a formal

mal condemnation there : a circumstance occurring, it is to be feared, in most cases of self-justification ; which seldom is undertaken without bringing on some odious comparisons between ourselves and our neighbours.

The address of the Pharisee, it was before remarked, consisted of two particulars of presumption : in the first, he boasted of his exemption from sins ; in the second, he advanced his claim to virtues ; the nature of which, deserves our attention : “ I fast,” says he, “ twice a week ; I give tithes of all I possess.” Thus is it that we judge of ourselves on the score of merit. We comfort ourselves with the performance of some external formalities of religion, while the weightier parts of it remain neglected and forgotten. What the hands and the lips can do, we are ready to undertake, and proud of having accomplished ; but the duties of the heart, the work of amending and converting, that we pass by, as unnecessary and unpleasant : and how grievous a mistake that is, we cannot but allow, when we recollect the positive declaration of our Lord, to the sect of the Pharisees

sees in general, which may explain the reason of his condemnation of the Pharisee in my text. "Woe unto you Pharisees! for ye
"tithe mint and rue, and all manner of herbs,
"and pass over judgment and the love of
"God; ye make clean the outside of the
"cup and platter; but your inward part is
"full of ravening and wickedness: these
"ought ye to have done, and not leave the
"other undone." The religion of Christ was intended to work our salvation, by producing our reformation, which never can consist in external performances, that in themselves have no intrinsic worth, and cannot therefore have any to communicate; so that it seems, upon the whole, very evident, that the Pharisee's address would be very unbecoming in the mouth of the best of us, and deserving, under the most favourable circumstances, that it should be rejected of God; they, indeed, who are worthy of that character, are but too sensible, that after having done all, they are unprofitable servants, to pretend to any comparative excellence or positive merit from their good conduct. Too
well

well convinced of the infinite mercies of God, and the unspeakable privileges we have derived from the gracious interposition of his blessed Son in our favour, to transfer the foundation of their hopes to their own powers, and their own exertion of them; to exchange the humble confidence of the Christian, for the foolish arrogance of the Pharisee.

Which leads me to my
III^d head, wherein I proposed to conclude, with some practical reflections on the observation of my text, that "whofoever exalteth himself, shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted." This precept, which contains the doctrine of the parable we have been considering, is too decisive to be misunderstood. We must remember, moreover, that the exaltation which is promised to self-abasement, and the humiliation which is threatened to vanity and high-mindedness, are the rewards and punishments of our Lord himself, and have therefore every possible sanction to establish their certainty and importance. It is impossible, in the nature of things, that pride should ever escape
with

with impunity under the gospel-dispensation. A dispensation which exhibits to us the everlasting Son of God, taking upon himself human nature in its lowest condition, and with its worst circumstances, and humbling himself unto death, even the death of the cross, to redeem us from sin, and to teach us how we must expect to recover that ennobled state which we have forfeited by our fall ; (namely, by crucifying the corruptions of our earthly nature, and rising again, through the power of his regenerating spirit, to newness of life and conduct.) Such a dispensation, I say, that so loudly proclaims the wretchedness of our condition, and the defects of our natural powers, must necessarily reject all pretensions to self-confidence, and reserve all its blessings for those, who with deep humility seek to obtain them. This humility, we must observe, to which our Lord has promised exaltation, is not the humility of a moment, to be evidenced only by a single act ; it is to be the leading principle of our lives, distinguishing invariably our deportment towards God and man. Every instant of them will furnish

nish us with proofs of our weakness, fallibility, and propensity to evil; and therefore every instant will require the exercise of a virtue, which is only binding on us, because it is the result of our consciousness of being nothing, and having nothing of ourselves, and of our deriving all our sufficiency from the free grace and bounty of God: that consciousness the gospel having clearly confirmed to us, by revealing to us the extent of human misery, “and the completion of its redemption in “Christ Jesus our Saviour,” has therefore, with peculiar energy, inforced on our practice this self-denying virtue, which it has, moreover, exemplified in the most striking manner through the whole course of his life, upon earth, from the commencement of his incarnation to the awful moment, when his humanity expired upon the cross! So that, in a word, we are urged by motives of propriety of duty, of interest, of love, of fear, to extinguish every latent principle of pride, self-will, and conceitedness, and “to put on, as “the elect of God, meekness, humbleness, and “lowliness

“ lowliness of mind ;” which are the characteristic graces of Christianity, and will assuredly be rewarded by the Author and Finisher of our faith, in his own kingdom of righteousness, peace, and love, which he founded upon earth ; and will, hereafter, consummate in glory, in heaven.

"fornication, and such like things," which are the charge-
 "of the law of Christ," and will not
 "be rewarded by the Father and Son."
 "of the Father, in his own kingdom of right-
 "eousness, grace, and love, which he has
 "prepared for his children, who are
 "in Christ, in heaven."

DISCOURSE X.

THE TALENTS.

MATTHEW, xxv. Ver. 14.

DISCOURSE X.

THE FALLEN

MAN, &c. &c. &c.

DISCOURSE X.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. xxv. the 14th Verse.

The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

THESE words are the beginning of a beautiful parable of our Lord, intended to illustrate the opposite consequences which would ensue, to such as improved, and to such as neglected, the different means of grace which were afforded them by God, their all wise and benevolent Master.

It may not be improper to observe, that the words, “the kingdom of heaven,” are not in the original, and that they are here erroneously supplied; for the preceding verse of the

chapter, running thus, “ watch ye, there-
“ fore, for ye know neither the day nor the
“ hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.”
My text should take up the subject by observ-
ing, “ for He is as a man travelling into a far
“ country, who called his own servants, and
“ delivered unto them his goods ; and unto
“ one,” continues the parable, “ he gave
“ five talents, to another two, and to another
“ one ; to every man according to his sever-
“ al ability. Then he that had received the
“ five talents, went and traded with the
“ same, and made other five talents ; and
“ likewise he that had received two, he also
“ gained other two ; but he that had received
“ one, went and digged in the earth, and hid
“ his lord’s money. After a long time the
“ lord of these servants cometh, and reckon-
“ eth with them ; and so he that had received
“ five talents, came and brought other five
“ talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto
“ me five talents, behold, I have gained be-
“ sides them, five talents more. His lord
“ said unto him, Well done, good and faith-
“ ful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a
“ few

“ few things, I will make thee ruler over
“ many things; enter thou into the joy of
“ thy lord. He also that had received two
“ talents, came and said, Lord, thou deliver-
“ edst unto me two talents, behold I have
“ gained two other talents besides them. His
“ lord said unto him, Well done, good and
“ faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over
“ a few things, I will make thee ruler over
“ many things; enter thou into the joy of
“ thy lord. Then he which had received
“ the one talent, came and said, Lord, I knew
“ thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping
“ where thou hast not sown, and gathering
“ where thou hast not sowed; and I was
“ afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the
“ earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.
“ And he answered and said unto him, Thou
“ wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest
“ that I reap where I sowed not, and ga-
“ ther where I have not sowed; thou
“ oughtest therefore to have put my money
“ to the exchangers, and then, at my com-
“ ing, I should have received mine own with
“ usury. Take therefore the talent from him,
14 “ and

“ and give it unto him that hath ten talents.
“ For unto every one that hath shall be given,
“ and he shall have abundance ; but from
“ him that hath not shall be taken away, even
“ that which he hath : and cast ye the unpro-
“ fitable servant into outer darkness, there
“ shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Such is the parable at length, which I shall proceed,

Ist. To compare, in all its parts, with the conduct and condition of Christians, according to our Saviour's design in delivering it ; and

IIdly. To apply, in such a practical sense, as may render it of advantage to all of us.

Ist. then, to compare the particulars of the parable with the conduct and condition of Christians.

The allusion to a man travelling into a far country, aptly represents to us the interval of probation which Providence allows in this life for the employment of those gifts or talents with which he has endowed us ; as the expression of his own servants plainly refers to that absolute right which God has, both to us and to our services, upon so many undeniable accounts :

accounts : and that of his delivering unto them his goods, strongly asserts that undoubted fact, that we are indebted for every thing we enjoy, to his free bounty and goodness. The gifts, which are particularly described in the parable by the name of talents, an ancient denomination of money of considerable value, are those of a spiritual and moral nature : those visitations of grace, which, in the voice of conscience, or revelation, persuade, incite, or empower us to the practice of virtue—virtue, when in its most sublime and extensive sense : these, the parable tells us, are distributed in various proportions, “ to each man according to his several ability ;” agreeably to that degree of advancement for which their all-wise Creator originally designed and formed them ; from each, therefore, he expects an improvement suitable to the means with which He has furnished them ; for as the entrusting a servant with money, in the times of which our Saviour spake, seems necessarily to have implied that it should be profitably employed in different branches of trade, according to the turn and capacity of the person confided in ;

in; so it is a truth, of which none are ignorant, that we are bound by the very nature of our condition, to avail ourselves, as far as possible, of the opportunities of instruction and improvement which God has afforded us. The servant who received five talents, and he who received two, went and traded with them, and gained in proportion to the stock which they possessed; from whence we may collect, that those who endeavour to make a good use of their advantages, will not fail of being successful, but that the same beneficent Being, who has laid the good foundation, will himself co-operate with their labours, in finishing the work suitably to its beginning. All, however, are not so laudably industrious and active. The servant who had received one talent went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money; and too many there are who neglect the gracious calls to repentance and holiness of life, which God so liberally addresses to all in the gospel of his blessed Son, and bury every principle of divine life under the low, carnal propensities of their earthly nature.

“ After

“After a long time,” we are told, “the
“lord of these servants cometh, and reckoneth
“with them.” In like manner a time will
certainly come, however distant it may at pre-
sent seem, when we must all give an account
of the use we have made of our talents to the
same Lord and Saviour, who has been the
gracious instrument of the divine love and
mercy towards mankind. Those, who, with
with the prudence and application of the first
and second servant, have made profit of their
time, shall be amply rewarded for their obe-
dience; the talents they have gained upon
their original deposit, shall be bestowed upon
themselves; every thing they have done in
the service of their Master, will be an inhan-
cement of their own felicity; and however ar-
duous the work, and unwearied their efforts
may have been, they will all be abundantly
recompensed on the day of account.

The servant, on the contrary, who had re-
ceived one talent, and refused to improve it,
will experience a far different allotment. The
parable tells us that he came, and said to his
master, “Lord, I knew thee, that thou art
“an

“ an hard man, reaping where thou hast not
“ sown, and gathering where thou hast not
“ strowed; and I was afraid, and went and
“ hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou
“ hast that is thine.” Similar are the excuses
which the idle and the vicious make to them-
selves; and as their very thoughts are intimately
known to God, virtually to Him also for their
spiritual unprofitableness. ‘How,’ say they,
‘can he expect perfection of creatures whom
‘he has made imperfect, and prone to error?
‘Why should he require of us the renuncia-
‘tion of passions and desires, which he has
‘permitted to exist in our natures? Surely
‘he cannot exact such harsh conditions as the
‘gospel propounds to us! and if he does,
‘their severity will induce him to forgive our
‘transgressing the letter of them; while we
‘refrain from flagrant enormities, we may
‘rest satisfied that he will pardon the errors
‘of deficiency and omission, which he knows
‘to be unavoidable.’

Such is the delusion which lays hold of
many a mind, and leads them from one step
to another, till it plunges them into a state of
reprobation

reprobation here, and of eternal misery hereafter. Attributing to God the effects of human corruption, which has deformed the fair work of creative goodness and wisdom, they falsely suppose that he has authorized every stormy and unruly passion and propensity, which rage in fallen man, and ungratefully forget that he has furnished them with means and motives, both within and without, to direct, govern, and subdue them; and has annexed present and future happiness to their availing themselves of them, for the regulation of their lives, upon the principles which He has laid down; and will therefore most reasonably punish the disobedience and transgression which proceed from their predominance and excess; and thus, under the influence of this mental blindness, they go on sinning and justifying themselves, until they arrive at that awful period, when Christ himself, whose commands have seemed so cruel and rigorous, will convict them of their impiety, as the master in the parable confuted and condemned his servant's conduct, for burying his talent in the earth, in contempt of his commands.—

“ And

“ And he answered, and said, Thou wicked
“ and slothful servant, thou knewest that I
“ reap where I have not sowed, and gather
“ where I have not strawed, thou oughtest,
“ therefore, to have put my money to the
“ exchangers, and then at my coming I
“ should have received mine own with usury.
“ Take therefore the talent from him, and
“ give it unto him that hath ten talents : for
“ unto every one that hath shall be given,
“ and he shall have abundance ; but from
“ him that hath not shall be taken away, even
“ that which he hath : and cast ye the un-
“ profitable servant into outer darkness ; there
“ shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”—

Which may be interpreted in more general terms—‘ Didst thou then know that I exacted
‘ more of my creatures than I enabled them
‘ to do? Thou who from time to time hast
‘ felt thyself moved from within to the prac-
‘ tice of virtue—who hast so often received
‘ the sharpest remonstrances from thy con-
‘ science, for abandoning thyself to vice and
‘ irreligion—who hast lived under the light
‘ of a revelation, which has clearly defined
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‘ the bounds of duty, has promised assistance
‘ to the willing, and has strengthened all its
‘ doctrines and injunctions with the sanctions
‘ of reward and punishment, which even su-
‘ persede the power of death : canst thou,
‘ I say, in the possession of all these advan-
‘ tages of information and instruction, pretend
‘ to justify thyself for thy deficiencies, with-
‘ out having even endeavoured to remove
‘ them, abandoned as thou hast been to ha-
‘ bitual sloth, and wilful ignorance? Know
‘ then, that every instance of grace and mercy
‘ is withdrawn from thee, and thou must now
‘ learn to thy cost, what thou mightest once
‘ have known to thy profit, that they who
‘ wantonly neglect the spiritual gifts which are
‘ bestowed upon them, shall not only be de-
‘ prived of any additional helps, but shall
‘ even lose the advantage of those already con-
‘ ferred, and be left, in this world, to the dire-
‘ ful consequences of listening to the sophis-
‘ tries of perverted reason, and be doomed
‘ hereafter to the torments of everlasting pu-
‘ nishment ; while those who have concurred
‘ with the gracious intentions of God towards
‘ them,

‘ them, will be continually experiencing an
‘ increase of his blessed influence in this pre-
‘ sent life, and at last be admitted into that
‘ kingdom of glory above, which he has esta-
‘ blished, to reward the faithful subjects of
‘ his kingdom of righteousness upon earth.’

Having thus considered, the parable in a comparative view, with respect to the conduct and condition of Christians, I proceed, in the

II^d and last place, to draw from thence such practical inferences as may render it of advantage to all of us. We may learn from the tenor of the parable, that negative virtue falls far short of the duty which the gospel enjoins us. The idle and unprofitable servant, who was condemned to outer darkness, had neither squandered away his lord’s talent, nor appropriated it to himself; but he was punished for not having improved it, as the condition of his being entrusted with it naturally required of him. We cannot then, by any means, be justified for suffering the divine grace to lie buried in idleness. It is not sufficient for us to do no evil, we must be actively good, to the

the utmost of our ability and opportunity ; and when we check our advancement to an attainable degree of perfection, we may be assured that we are liable to the sentence pronounced against the servant in the parable. " Cease to do evil, learn to do well," are concomitant precepts of the gospel, which we can never separate with propriety and safety. The Mosaic covenant proposed a positive law, which could not be disobeyed with impunity at any rate ; the gospel, revealing a milder system of procedure toward mankind, exacted nothing but what was plainly within the compass of human powers ; a simple exertion of the endeavours, however deficient the result might be ; but less than this it was not, it could not be satisfied with. Though our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, the messenger of this latter covenant, be come into the world to save sinners, he will not save them without a disposition to repentance and amendment on their part ; which must, moreover, end in a reformation and a new life, affecting the principles and propensities, and of course the actions of the convert ; which, however, with

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every spiritual advantage which his gospel affords, derive so much imperfection and infirmity from the inherent corruptions of human nature, that they can never pretend to merit its rewards : how then can the idle and unprofitable servant, who hides his lord's talent in a napkin, expect to accommodate his partial performances to such an universal rule ? Where the best of us are only saved by the merciful acceptance of God, of what avail can his pretensions be, at the tribunal of Christ ?

And if a servant, who returned his master's property entire, was considered as unfaithful to his trust, what can they expect, who destroy the noble faculties that are bestowed upon them, and, deserting the paths of righteousness, boldly adventure upon the practice of sin ? The parable before them must surely convince them that their's is a desperate case ; and that they must tread back, as soon as possible, the dangerous steps they have taken : their time of accounting may be nearer at hand than they imagine ; and clearly as its circumstances have been defined by
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our Lord, there will not remain even the shadow of a pretence to those who would alledge ignorance as a palliation of their fault; and what other ground of defence they can have, when less atrocious criminals cannot escape punishment, I leave to themselves to determine: we, I trust, do not know these things in vain, but will be of the number of those, who, having received the talents of their Master, will, by their use of them, obtain that glorious approbation in the parable, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" "enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

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tain that glorious approbation in the parable.
"Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"
"Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

DISCOURSE XI.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

MATT. XXV. Ver. 46.

DISCOURSE XI.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

Matthew 25: 1-13.

DISCOURSE XI.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. xxv. the 46th Verse.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

THIS most important declaration of our Lord, is the close of a parabolical discourse, which he addressed to his disciples, on the subject of the last judgment, and the interesting consequences of it to the virtuous and to the wicked, who would all be called to its tribunal, to be condemned or acquitted, according to their works in the flesh.

My design in adopting this passage of Scripture, for the present subject of our meditations, is,

Ist. To give you the parable at large, with
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such observations as may explain some striking particulars of it.

And Ildly. To draw such practical inferences from the whole of it, and more especially from the verse under consideration, as may tend to shew us how intimately we are concerned in the assurances which it contains.

Ist. To begin then with the parable at large: “When the Son of Man,” said our Lord, upon concluding the parable of the talents “shall come in his glory, and all the
“holy angels with him, then shall he sit up-
“on the throne of his glory: and before him
“shall be gathered all nations; and he shall
“separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:
“and he shall set the sheep on his right
“hand, but the goats on the left. Then
“shall the King say unto them on his right
“hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from
“the foundation of the world: for I was an
“hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was
“thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a
“stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and
“ye

“ ye cloathed me ; I was sick, and ye visited
“ me ; I was in prison and ye came unto me.
“ Then shall the righteous answer him, say-
“ ing, Lord when saw we thee an hungred,
“ and fed thee ? or thirsty, and gave thee
“ drink ? When saw we thee a stranger, and
“ took thee in ? or naked, and cloathed thee ?
“ Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison,
“ and came unto thee ?—And the king shall
“ answer, and say unto them, Verily I say
“ unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto
“ one of the least of these my brethren, ye
“ have done it unto me.—Then shall he say
“ also unto them on the left hand, Depart
“ from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire,
“ prepared for the devil and his angels ; for I
“ was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat ;
“ I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink ; I
“ was a stranger, and ye took me not in ;
“ naked, and ye cloathed me not ; sick, and in
“ prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall
“ they also answer him, saying, Lord, when
“ saw we thee an hungred, or a thirst, or a
“ stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and
“ did not minister unto thee ? Then shall he
“ answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you,
inasmuch

“ inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least
“ of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall
“ go away into everlasting punishment ; but
“ the righteous into life eternal.”

Our Lord begins this very remarkable passage of his doctrine, by telling us that we shall be judged by him, in that human nature, (glorified and suited to its inhabitation in heaven) wherein he appeared on earth, to preach and exemplify that gospel, which will be the rule of his judgment at the dissolution of this scene of human probation. Before him shall be assembled all nations, now distinguished only by the tenor of their conduct upon earth. On the right hand, (the place of honour, and, according to the Jewish custom, the place of absolution and acquittal from punishment, as the left hand was of condemnation ;) on the right hand are placed the sheep, the more harmless and useful part of the flock, and therefore emblematic of the virtuous and the good ; and on the left, the goats, which from the exorbitancy of their lusts, might be deemed very proper representatives of the vi-

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cious and the wicked, if there was not reason to suppose, that our Saviour has used these allusions, only in conformity with his former observation, that the Son of Man should separate the multitude assembled at his tribunal, one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats, having merely assumed it, in the verse immediately subsequent, and then entirely dropt it for the rest of the parable. Thus arranged, their Judge, whose omniscience needs not the testimony of witnesses to be informed of their deserts, will immediately proceed to pass sentence upon them, and to convince them of the justice of their awards. To those on the right hand he will say, Come ye blessed of my Father! inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world! How glorious, how gracious a declaration does this address involve!—Come, ye blessed of my Father!—Ye who have wisely concurred in the benevolent purposes of divine love towards mankind:—Come, and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: Come and enjoy the endless felicity, which

which that love hath designed, from everlasting, for all such as do not perversely disqualify themselves for it : and what a wonderful proof have we of its extent and degree, in his declaring that the smallest offices of charity, done unto the least of his brethren, he considers as done unto himself, and will reward as such ; in acknowledging those as his brethren, whose fraternity to him is entirely derived from his goodness, in having taken upon himself our nature, to enable us to become partakers of his own : for thus it was, that “ when the fulness of time was come, “ God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, “ made under the law, to redeem them that “ were under the law, that we might receive “ the adoption of sons ; ” — “ and because we “ are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of “ his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father ! bearing witness with our spirit, that “ we are the children of God ; and if children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ ; ” who hath, in this instance, confirmed the relationship, by calling us his brethren, and declaring that he takes a
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lively interest in every thing that befalls us ; thereby intimating, that the discharge of our duty to men, is so closely connected with the right performance of our duty to God, that this can never be said to be done, while that is defective and incomplete ; and that no justifiable reason can be assigned for our neglecting to exercise the offices of charity to all that require them ; when Christ himself, even in the glorious character of the Judge of the whole earth, hath testified so strong an attachment to, and recognized so close a connection with the least of his disciples. We are here to observe, that the qualifications of the good and the disqualifications of the wicked, are—not the having abstained from evil in the one instance, and the having committed it in the other ; but the performance and the neglect of duties, and those the duties of charity and benevolence ; and should it be enquired why our Lord hath said nothing of those, and hath laid such stress upon these, we may answer, that it is an error very common among men, to consider the neglect of duties as a matter of most trivial importance,
even

even while they dread the commission of crimes. Hence it frequently happens, that those who are negatively good, are extremely defective in the performance of positive virtues; wherefore, as this is an error of most pernicious consequence in religion, which lays down general rules, extending to every moment of our lives, and to all the opportunities of action which they furnish, it was highly becoming the wisdom of our Lord, to avail himself of this interesting occasion, to give us the most solemn caution against it: and with respect to his having fixed upon the duties of charity and benevolence, as so essential to salvation, we are to reflect that the discharge of them, which is founded upon the consideration of their objects being Christ's brethren, (which is an implication fairly to be drawn from the context) necessarily supposes them to flow from the only source of every virtue, even the love of God, and a due sense of his goodness; this then having become an active principle in our minds, must give birth to an uniform practice of all the virtues, as well those which are omitted, as those which
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are mentioned in the parable before us. It is, besides, to be observed, that the charity which is here commended, is not a single, transient act, but a system of conduct exerted upon every possible occasion; relieving the distressed in every condition which required assistance, even in those where there was not the least probability of its being requited by the person obliged. This charity must, therefore, be pure and sincere, and there is such a natural affinity and connection between the virtues, that it is absurd to suppose one to flourish to such a degree of perfection, where the others are wanting; all of which, too, are in some respect or other, connected with that spirit of love, which constitutes the essence of that particular one. We are not, therefore, to conclude, that because our Saviour has not particularized every virtue, he had intended to insinuate, that any were not absolutely requisite to our obtaining the rewards of the kingdom of Heaven; on the contrary, having insisted upon charity, in such a high degree of intension, as to amount to the greatest excellence of that virtue, which cannot exist, but in
a mind

a mind attuned to every other, we have the best reason to infer that none can purposely be neglected, without making every other endeavour wholly fruitless and ineffectual; not to say that in many passages of Scripture, which are of equal authority with this, they are all specifically enforced on our practice, as absolutely necessary to the perfection which we are bound to seek after, and, if possible, to attain by our Christian profession.

Another remarkable circumstance in the parable we are considering, is, that the sentence of condemnation against the wicked, is not directly opposed to that of reward, which is delivered to the good; it is not said to the wicked, "Depart from me, ye cursed of my Father! into everlasting fire, prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" but only "Depart from me, ye cursed! into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." By which mode of expression our Saviour intended, in all probability, to describe to us, the gracious disposition of God towards mankind, as well as the severity of punishment which the base ingratitude of the wicked

wicked would incur. With respect to the first particular, he intimates very forcibly to us, that none have been destined to punishment before they sinned ; and that the accursed have only themselves to accuse for the misery of their condition ; that God wills that all should be saved, having furnished the means of salvation to every man, with that possibility of forfeiting it, which is necessary to the freedom of their wills ; and without which, they would be machines and not men : and this doctrine is farther confirmed and enforced by the description given of the punishment which awaits those who have made themselves wicked ; it is the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Man, therefore, as long as he fulfilled the law of his nature, had no place of punishment allotted to him by God ; nor would he have been sentenced to any, if he had not assumed the self-willed nature of devils, and so far associated himself with them, as to deserve the doom which was intended for those fallen spirits ; and with respect to the severity which the base ingratitude of the wicked

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would incur, as it is insinuated in the sentence pronounced in the parable; nothing can be more emphatic than the circumstance of their being consigned to the punishment of devils, which at once convinces us of the heinousness of their crimes, and of the greatness of their misery. The last particular which I shall point out to your observation in the parable, is, our Lord's declaring that he will consider every neglect of charity and benevolence towards the least of his brethren, in as atrocious a light as if it were an offence immediately committed against himself. This is, in some respects, a still more pregnant instance of the divine philanthropy, than even rewarding the compassionate in a correspondent manner, as before remarked, inasmuch as the fear of punishment operates more strongly on the human mind, than even the hope of reward; and as its force is more particularly directed to those, who would be more prone to withhold their good offices to the indigent. But whatever may be the comparative effect of our Saviour's promises and threatenings, considered separately, and in opposition

opposition to each other, when we take them as he has represented them to us, combined and united, we cannot but confess, that the divine Providence and goodness have interposed the strongest inducements to charity and benevolence, and the most powerful determents from cruelty and inhumanity, that can possibly be conceived; and that, therefore, the kind and friendly have every motive to encourage the laudable tendency of their disposition, and the morose and unfeeling, every warning to alarm and check them in the indulgence of their savage tempers, that can be important to both in this state of probation, to prepare them for the event of that of retribution.

And this brings me to my
Ild head; wherein I proposed to draw such practical inferences from the whole of the parable, and more especially from the verse which we are considering, as may tend to shew us how intimately we are concerned in the assurance it contains.

In the first place, we must be convinced by it, of the certainty of a day of judgment, and

of its general influence over all the sons of men—over all nations, indiscriminately assembled to meet the Lord. The good, therefore, under every discouraging circumstance of their present condition, have this most abundant consolation to sustain them, that their labours will not be in vain in the Lord, and that their light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While the wicked, who seem to be in this world, possessed of every thing to constitute earthly felicity, have this goading sting to interrupt all their enjoyments; that their crimes cannot escape with impunity; but that though judgment be not speedily executed, it will inevitably overtake them in due season, and in full proportion to their demerits.

Lastly, we are instructed by the parable in the consequences of that final judgment which it reveals to us. The good, it assures us, will be invited to enter into happiness by the most engaging address of Christ himself; the bad will be banished by him, to the
mournful

mournful society of the devil and his angels ! Think for a moment, on the infinite difference between the invitation and the repulse of our Lord ; between a “ Come ye blessed of my Father ! inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world ; ” and a “ Depart from me, ye cursed ! into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels : ” and that too, when delivered by the Son of God ! Think too, upon the full import and extent of the invitation and the repulse ; “ These shall go away into everlasting punishment ; but the righteous into life eternal. ”—Everlasting punishment !—Eternal life ! What is there that is not comprehended in these emphatic terms ? Oh ! let us endeavour to feel the force of them, while we may feel it to advantage ! While yet we have the poor, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner, within our reach, who call upon us to relieve them, as those for whom Christ died ; whom he loved, and whom he hath commanded us to love, as his brethren !—To love them in the energy of that spirit,

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rit, in which he hath required us to walk, that we may so pass through things temporal, that finally we lose not the things eternal.

DISCOURSE XII.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

LUKE X. Ver. 36, 37.

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DISCOURSE XII.

ST. LUKE, Chap. x. the 36th and 37th Verses.

*Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was
neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?
And he said, He that shewed mercy unto him:
Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou
likewise.*

THESE are the concluding verses of our Lord's parable of the traveller who fell among thieves; delivered with a design to illustrate that spirit of benevolence, which the gospel inculcates on its followers, in a degree superior to any other system of moral conduct which has been propounded to mankind.

Nothing could have promoted such a design more effectually, than the parable in question;

question ; which is most exactly suited to the occasion of its being delivered.

“ Behold,” says the Evangelist, “ a certain lawyer stood up and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life ? He said unto him, What is written in the law ? How readest thou ? And he answering, said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right ; this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour ? And Jesus answering, said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead ; and by chance there came down a certain priest that way ; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side : and likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on
“ the

“ the other side : but a certain Samaritan, as
“ he journeyed, came where he was ; and when
“ he saw him, he had compassion on him,
“ and went to him, and bound up his wounds,
“ pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his
“ own beast, and brought him to an inn,
“ and took care of him. And on the morrow,
“ when he departed, he took out two pence,
“ and gave them to the host, and said unto
“ him, Take care of him ; and whatsoever
“ thou spendest more, I will repay thee.
“ Which now of these three, thinkest thou,
“ was neighbour unto him that fell among the
“ thieves ? And he said, He that shewed mercy
“ on him : Then said Jesus unto him, Go
“ and do thou likewise.”

The Jewish lawyer being wishful to examine into the nature of our Saviour's doctrines, propounded his question concerning eternal life, as such an one as would induce an answer satisfactory to his enquiries. Our Lord, we find, defined the requisites for obtaining it, agreeably to the tenor of the law. Love to God, in the first instance, and love to our neighbour, in the second, comprehended,

hended, in his opinion, the whole extent of our duty, insomuch that he assured him, that if he practised them in their true spirit, he himself stood a fair chance of inheriting that eternal life, about which he was so curious. The lawyer, pleased with these encomiums, and wishful to be farther commended, asked him, “And who is my neighbour?” Flattering himself our Saviour would confine his interpretation of the law within the narrow limits to which the Jewish doctors restrained it; he hoped, that as he had practised the duty of loving his neighbour in that degree, our Lord’s account of it would be a considerable addition to his own personal reputation: here, however, he was mistaken. The parable which followed answered his question, and clearly convinced him of the error of his construction and practice of the precept. The case it laid before him, was this:—A certain Jew travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho, upon a road remarkably infested with robbers, unfortunately fell into their hands; who, having plundered and wounded him, left him in the most desperate condition, unable to help

help himself, and exhibiting the strongest proof of his want of assistance, from the charity and humanity of others. At this juncture, a priest and a Levite of his own nation, furnished with every possible motive to relieve him, but their own inclination, came by that way; but having gratified their curiosity by a transient view of him, they continued their journey without farther delay. At this moment a Samaritan appeared, whom every worldly consideration might have induced to treat the wounded man with the utmost scorn, neglect, and contempt; separated as he was, by national prejudices, religious and political, which operated in general upon their mutual brethren, with the most rooted aversion and bitter hatred that can be conceived; but his mind, superior to every narrow and malevolent principle, felt and acknowledged the many undeniable claims which the sufferings of a fellow creature make, upon the humanity of a happier being; forgetting that he was a Jew, and himself a Samaritan, and regardless of every consequent impediment which might have arisen from thence, he instantly

stantly afforded him the relief which the ancient custom of travelling with provisions of different kinds, for the exigencies of the journey, enabled him to administer by the way; and having done all that his situation could then empower him to do, he conveyed him to the next inn; and there having continued his personal care of him for that day, he engaged that of the host on the morrow, by the advance of some money, and the promise of more, to defray the expences which might be incurred in the course of his cure. The sum which he is said to have advanced, being small, gives us reason to suppose that his own pecuniary abilities were contracted, and therefore enhances his merit in so readily exerting them, under the most discouraging circumstances. “Which now of these “three,” continued our Lord, “thinkest “thou, was neighbour unto him that fell “among the thieves?” Prejudice itself could not deny that the Samaritan had best deserved the name; and accordingly the lawyer replied, “He that shewed mercy on him.” Then said Jesus unto him, “Go and do thou likewise.”

“wife.” Learn from hence, how grossly thou hast hitherto mistaken the precept of Moses, and from this time reform thy practice in this particular, considering every man who wants thy assistance, as entitled to receive it, of whatever sect, profession, or nation he may be.

Having thus considered the parable in all its parts, I proceed to make some general use of it :

Accordingly I propose to shew

I. That no possible circumstance can authorize our adopting so unchristian a conduct as that of the Priest and the Levite in the parable.

But that Ildly. If we could be the disciples of Christ, and obtain the privileges of his kingdom, we are bound to imitate the benevolence of the Samaritan, agreeably to our Lord’s injunction to the lawyer, to “ go and “ do likewise.”

Ist. Then to shew ‘ that no possible circumstance can authorize our adopting so ‘ unchristian a conduct as that of the Priest ‘ and Levite in the parable,

This will appear

Ist.

1st. From the reflection, that we are all of us liable to misfortune ; and

2dly. From the consideration that we are every one of us the object of God's bounty and mercies.

1st. The most obvious argument to deter us from hardheartedness and cruelty towards others, is, the probability that we ourselves may, one day or other, stand in need of the very assistance we withhold from them. Instability is the universal condition of human existence, and human enjoyment ; so that the man, who to-day can boast of possessing the fairest gifts of life, health, and fortune, may to-morrow be mouldering in the dust, or shivering under the hard hand of penury and adversity. We have then motives, even of prudence and self-interest, to incline us to the performance of acts of compassion and benevolence to our fellow creatures ; who may, in their turn, have opportunities of exercising those same virtues, through the reverse of our own fortunes ; and whose inclinations to benefit us by them, must certainly be influenced, in some measure, by our treatment of them,

them, when they were necessitated and distressed. In this view of things, then every kind act we do, is something added to our stock of comfort, laid up against the day of trouble; and he who is unfruitful in them, is cruel to himself, in instances wherein he is least able to bear the neglect, and to command the attention of mankind.

2dly. This, however, is a consideration very inferior to that which I suggested in the second place, of our being all the objects of God's bounty and mercies.

“Freely ye have received,” said our Lord to his disciples on another occasion, “freely give.” On this we should, in like manner, from the consciousness of our being perpetually indebted to God, for every species of blessing we have been enjoying from the first moment of our lives to the present, be induced to afford to the indigent a share of those comforts we derive from him; often in such abundance, as to be able to part with a portion of them, without impairing our own convenience. Almost in every instance it happens that the services we render, are infinitely

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nitely superior to the loss which we sustain from them, and therefore furnish a reflection so pleasing, as to make us in truth the gainers by them; but this is not all. The gospel has positively taught us that the condition upon which we must expect the favour of Heaven, depends upon our deportment towards our brethren, whose claims upon our good offices increase upon us, as we are Christians; so that the benevolent employment of our faculties and powers is most indispensably binding upon us for our own sakes, as creatures whose welfare is entirely in the hands of God, the universal benefactor of mankind; he having vindicated his right of exacting from us a strict account of our manner of using his benefits, by assuring us that "with what measure we mete, it shall be meted to us again." Here then again, we have most powerful dissuaves from adopting the unfeeling conduct of the Priest and the Levite. What their motives were for passing by the wounded traveller, without stopping to assist him in his distress, we cannot precisely determine. The least criminal which they could have had, was the
fear

fear of incurring the like misfortune by their delay; but even this was of infinitely less cogency, than those which they possessed to succour him. Their law had taught them to love their neighbour as themselves. The wounded man, as a Jew, was, even in their own prejudiced opinion, their neighbour. Could it then authorize them to neglect to relieve his actual misfortune, from the apprehension of their sustaining a possible one? But had he been a stranger, it would have taught them, if they read it aright, "to love the stranger; for that they had been strangers in Egypt;" and therefore would have left them without excuse, if the bond of countryman had not intervened, to strengthen his right of assistance from them. A Christian, in such a case, would be doubly blameable for passing by on the other side. He who has been taught that love is the great commandment of the religion he professes, by a Saviour, who commends himself to his regard as the propitiation for his sins, and not for his only, but also for the sins of the whole world, can never justify himself for withholding his good

offices in behalf of any human being, whose situation requires them. The hardhearted and cruel man must, therefore, either formally abjure his Christian vocation, or deceive himself concerning it, by practices which are directly opposite to the spirit, as well as the letter of its precepts, and which can never, by any palliating circumstances, be reconciled with either.

Which brings me to my

Ild head; wherein I was to shew, that if we would be the disciples of Christ, and claim the privileges of his kingdom, we are bound to imitate the benevolence of the Samaritan, agreeably to our Lord's injunction to the lawyer, to go and do likewise.

This is so clearly deducible from the nature of the occasion on which the parable is delivered, and from that of the parable itself, that I shall confine myself entirely to that single passage of Scripture.

Upon the lawyer's enquiring of our Saviour, "what he was to do to inherit eternal life," he gave him to understand that the love of God and of our neighbour, were absolutely necessary

fary for his obtaining it. This do, says he, and thou shalt live. If thou art master of these duties in thy practice, thou mayst be satisfied that thou hast arrived at the perfection of the Christian life. The first part of the precept was too clear to be mistaken; the second deserved some explanation, and accordingly our Saviour proceeded to shew him that the term neighbour, in the gospel acceptance of it, did not refer to any particular person locally distinguished, and therefore exclusively entitled to our love; but that it comprehended all mankind, without exception or restriction; in a word, that we were to love our neighbour as the Samaritan loved the Jew, because he was a fellow creature, and a fellow creature in distress, and that not with an affection which slept inactive and unfruitful in his breast, but which manifested itself in deeds of kindness and regard, at the first moment that they could be of service to him, and in a degree too, which seems to have been more proportioned to the wants of the object of his humanity, than to the abilities of his own fortune. Nothing can be more

lovely, nothing more aptly correspondent to the essential goodness and benevolence of the gospel dispensation, than the character of the good Samaritan, which our Lord has so beautifully depicted in the parable. Well then may he have enforced it as an example worthy of our imitation in these emphatic words of my text, "go and do thou likewise." But how are we to imitate it, while self predominates in our minds? Had the Samaritan been under the guidance of such a foul principle, he would have passed by the wounded traveller with no other attention, than perhaps, a sneer on his country, and a self-congratulation, that he himself was not in the forlorn condition to which he was reduced: but this he was incapable of. The parable tells us so, and our Lord's injunction confirms it. We therefore, to whom it has been addressed, must exert all our efforts to destroy the influence of that tyrant of our fallen nature, ere we can expect to possess that enlargement of heart which characterizes the true Christian, and constitutes the amiableness of the pattern which we are required to follow.

Think

Think for a moment what strong inducements we have to aspire after a similitude with it; that it is Christ who hath told us to go and do likewise, and who has added, do this, and ye shall live, not the short troublesome life of men upon earth, but the blissful and eternal life of angels in heaven. Let us then endeavour to obtain the promise, by obeying the precepts, remembering the precariousness of our condition, the tenure on which we enjoy the favour of our heavenly Father, and the indispensable demands of our gospel covenant, to which we have been called by a Master, who himself, “went about doing good,” and who has declared, that “by this shall men know that we are his disciples, if we have love one to another.”

DISCOURSE XIII.

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

LUKE XVI. Ver. 9.

DISCOURSE XIII

"THE UNWITTING SERVANT"

LIVERPOOL 1794

DISCOURSE XIII.

ST. LUKE, Chap. xvi. the 9th Verse.

*And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends
of the mammon of unrighteousness, that,
when ye fail, they may receive you into
everlasting habitations.*

THE verse which has been just now read to you, is the conclusion of our Lord's parable of the Unjust Steward, delivered to his disciples for the purpose of drawing a comparison between the attention which men of this world pay to their temporal interests, and the carelessness with which the best of us pursue the important concerns of their everlasting existence.

The parable in general, and my text in particular, being expressed in a manner somewhat

what obscure, has been frequently misunderstood and misapplied, and therefore deserves to be considered, in order to our doing justice to the meaning intended to be conveyed in it, by its Divine Author.

“ And he said unto his disciples, There
“ was a certain rich man which had a steward;
“ and the same was accused unto him,
“ that he had wasted his goods: and he
“ called him, and said unto him, How is
“ it that I hear this of thee? Give an account
“ of thy stewardship, for thou mayest
“ be no longer steward. Then the steward
“ said within himself, What shall I do? for
“ my lord taketh from me the stewardship:
“ I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed: I am
“ resolved what to do, that when I am put
“ out of the stewardship, they may receive
“ me into their houses. So he called every
“ one of his lord's debtors unto him, and
“ said unto the first, How much owest thou
“ unto my lord? And he said, An hundred
“ measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take
“ thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write
“ fifty. Then said he to another, And how
“ much owest thou? And he said, An hundred
“ measures

“measures of wheat. And he said unto him,
“Take thy bill and write fourscore. And the
“lord,” (i. e. his lord, who had taken from
him the stewardship) “commended the un-
“just steward, because he had done wisely;”
had acted prudently and consistently with the
worldly interest he was pursuing, in order to
secure himself an asylum, when displaced from
his family: “for,” as our Saviour observes,
when commenting in his own person on the
parable, “the children of this world are in
“their generation wiser than the children of
“light.”—“And I say unto you,” continues
he, “Make to yourselves friends of the mam-
“mon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail,
“they may receive you into everlasting habi-
“tations.” The subsequent reasoning of our
Saviour is important to our perfectly under-
standing what has preceded; “he that is
“faithful in that which is least, is faithful
“also in much: and he that is unjust in the
“least, is unjust also in much: if therefore
“ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous
“mammon, who will commit to you the true
“riches? And if ye have not been faithful in
“that

“ that which is another’s, who shall give un-
“ to you that which is your own ? ”

From the tenor of these observations of our Lord, it appears, that having delivered a parable descriptive of the conduct of a steward under particular circumstances, he has considered our condition also, with respect to God, in the light of a stewardship, by virtue of which we are intrusted with the perishable good things of this life, upon our use of which, is to depend our being invested with a recompence, which we shall obtain, not as a mere deposit placed in our hands for a time, but as a possession appropriated to ourselves, and to continue such for ever . if, therefore, we are unfaithful in our discharge of this trust of small value, we cannot be supposed to be worthy of one of greater importance ; much less therefore, when that inconsiderable trust is another’s, lent to us by God, can we expect, that, having misapplied that, he will reward us with a possession of the greatest consequence, which we may call our own : well therefore, may our Lord advise us, in the forcible language of personification, to make ourselves

selves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, i. e. of worldly advantages, the general objects of desire and ambition, and pre-eminently riches; that when our stewardship shall expire with our lives, our employment of them may make them so much our friends, as that their testimony may conduce to our being received into everlasting habitations; not into such houses as the steward wished to take refuge in, but into “a building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens:” he, indeed, endeavoured to make friends of his lord’s riches, by an application of them, which, though benevolent to his lord’s debtors, was unjust to him; but our disposal of the unrighteous mammon, the false, uncertain riches of this world to like benevolent purposes, will be no injustice to our Lord, who has lent them to us to that intent, and will procure us advantages infinitely surpassing those which he promised to himself, by the most unfair means; at best he could only expect to be the short-lived tenant of a mouldering mansion; whereas we may hope to be the immortal possessors of “everlasting habitations.”

“ tations.” The injustice, then, of the steward in the parable has no reference to the advice given by our Lord to his disciples, in his application of it, and appears to have been only mentioned as introductory to the account of that steward’s employment of the wealth which was committed to his care, not to his own gratification, but to the advantage of others; upon this one abstracted circumstance the whole comparison turns, without any connection with other particulars of the parable, which evidently do not admit of the parallel being continued with them: he was a steward, so are we stewards; he was entrusted with his lord’s goods; in like manner God confides in our hands temporal blessings, which he reserves to himself the privilege of withdrawing from us, or of taking us from them, whenever he thinks proper: previously to his being called to give an account of his stewardship, he endeavours, by acts of beneficence, to secure to himself certain advantages, which may survive the termination of it. In conformity with this plan, our Lord exhorts us to make a charitable and benevolent

lent use of the riches which we possess here, that when our lives are concluded, and our office fails, such an use may procure us advantages which will extend beyond the limits of our present existence, even to the endless ages of eternity : thus far the comparison evidently holds good ; but farther it is impossible that we can extend it, without the grossest impiety and absurdity.

From the parable of the unjust steward, thus discussed, the following practical truths may evidently be drawn : that riches are the gift of God ; that we are intrusted with them for certain purposes ; and that they are therefore trials of our obedience to his commands, and consequently instruments, which, according to our employment of them, may conduce to our eternal happiness or misery ; and that the proper employment of them, is, in doing all the good with them to others, that they will enable us to do.

From these deductions I proceed to shew more at large,

Ist. That we are bound to apply the riches which God bestows upon us, as he has re-

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quired

quired of us ; that is to say, in the most extensively benevolent manner possible.

And therefore Idly, that the accumulation and application of them to private and selfish gratifications, is an abuse of them, for which we must give a very severe account.

Ist. Nothing can be more clear, than that the bestower of a blessing has a right to dictate to the objects on whom it is bestowed, the manner in which it is to be enjoyed ; and to exact of them an account of their compliance with his commands : when we refer these general principles to the particular case of God and us, in regard to the conferring and receiving of benefits, we feel the strongest conviction that we are indebted to him for every species of good we possess : the very dispositions to industry and activity, and the ability to avail ourselves of them to advantage, which every one knows are second causes, conducing very powerfully to our success in worldly pursuits, are entirely derived from him : the happy result from the best use of these, comes to pass by his permission : the permanence of blessings once obtained, depends upon him ;
and

and our own continuance in life, so as to enjoy them, even for a moment, cannot be ensured without his concurrence : so that upon the best grounds, God is undoubtedly to be regarded as the universal and only Benefactor of the human race : and revelation has, with equal perspicuity, confirmed to us, that he always expects of those, on whom he bestows the good things of this life, that they should proportion their acts of kindness, charity and munificence toward their indigent fellow-creatures, to the means with which he has furnished them. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus very strongly enforces this duty : and it is one of the positive precepts of christianity, to “ charge them that are rich
“ in this world, not to trust in uncertain
“ riches, but in the living God, who giveth
“ richly all things to enjoy ; that they do
“ good ; that they be rich in good works ;
“ ready to distribute ; willing to communi-
“ cate ; laying up for themselves a good foun-
“ dation against the time to come.” Our Saviour’s advice to the young man in the gospel, who he declared to have been deficient in

a point very material to spiritual perfection, was, “to sell all that he had, and give to
“the poor:” a precept, which though it may not be incumbent on any christians, in the strict literal sense of the words, must yet lay great restrictions on all, in regard to the disposition of their riches, by clearly defining what is their true use and application; namely, the sacrificing every self-enjoyment of them, to the support and comfort of those, who being destitute of them, from their own means, have a divine claim upon us, to supply them from our superfluities. It is moreover of importance to us to remark the consequences which our Lord annexed to this precept; “Sell all that thou hast, and give
“to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in
“heaven;” a treasure, which he elsewhere greatly enhances, by a beautiful comparison between that and the worldly possessions which we too often prefer to it; “lay not up
“for yourselves,” says he, “treasures upon
“earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt,
“and where thieves break through and steal;
“but lay up for yourselves treasures in hea-
“ven,

“ven, where neither moth nor rust doth
“corrupt, and where thieves do not break
“through nor steal.” So infinitely liberal is
the compensation which our blessed Lord has
promised to us, for the disposing of the riches
(which God himself has bestowed upon us) in
a manner as highly satisfactory to every
noble principle of our better part, as it is use-
ful and advantageous to all around us.

And this brings me to my

Ild head; wherein I collected from the
preceding observations, that the accumulation
and employment of riches, for private and
selfish gratifications, is an abuse of them, for
which we must give a very severe account.

This is not only to be inferred from the
commendations which are given in Scripture
to bounty towards the poor, but is positively
declared in many striking passages of it.

“Woe unto you that are rich,” says our
Lord, “for ye have received your consol-
“tion.” The woe which is here denounced,
is not against all that are rich, but, agreeably
to our Lord’s explanation of the same word
in another place, against those that trust in
riches;

riches; who have considered them as only giving enjoyment and consolation to themselves. They, therefore, must not look for them from any other quarter, and will moreover find that that portion of them which they fancy that they have derived from riches, will be turned into sorrow. "Go to now, ye rich men," says St. James, ye that have lived in pleasure, and been wanton; who have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Go to now, weep and howl for the miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth eaten; your gold and your silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire."—"As for covetousness," saith St. Paul, "let it not be once named amongst you, as becometh saints; for this ye know, that no covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." And here we should observe, that the crime is equally the same, if our neglect of the poor proceeds from our squandering our wealth upon

upon our own gratifications, as from our hoarding it up. Avarice is a vice which is almost universally condemned; but self-love is so prevailing a passion, that few ever think that the money which is dedicated to their vices and vanities, is unjustly withheld from their poor brethren; yet, if we examine into the reason assigned, in the parable before alluded to, by Abraham to the rich man, for his being in torments, we shall find it to be no other than this: "Son, remember that thou "in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, "and likewise Lazarus evil things." His crime was his having denied him a share of his good things, and reserved them for himself; and was not less heinous in that case, than it would have been if he had locked them up from himself, as well as from others: at all events, it was of so atrocious a nature, as to subject him to the pains of hell; and furnishes us with a warning which should check us in a life of splendour, pleasure, and sensual gratifications, which the world fondly imagine to be perfectly justifiable, in those who possess a fortune adequate to its de-

mands. Our Saviour has told us, that “hardly
“shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of
“heaven ;” and therefore, those whose coffers
overflow with wealth, however acquired,
should be extremely careful how they employ
them, lest, having gained “the mammon of
“unrighteousness,” they should forfeit the
true riches ; the riches of eternity. Thrice
happy, on the contrary, will they be, if by a
wise and prudent use of it, not according to
the wisdom and prudence of this world, but
of Christ, they convert that which might
prove their ruin into a means of promoting
their everlasting benefit. Then will they
find that the comfort and relief they have ex-
tended to others, will be most amply returned
into their own bosom, and that the precept of
our Saviour contained in my text, spoke as
much the language of interest as of duty.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XIV.

THE SOWER.

"LUKE, Chap. viii. Ver. 5."

DISCOURSE XIV.

THE SOWER.

LUKE, Chap. VIII. Ver. 8.

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DISCOURSE XIV.

ST. LUKE, Chap. viii. the 5th Verse.

A sower went forth to sow his seed.

THESE words are the commencement of a parable delivered by our blessed Lord upon an occasion, when “much people being gathered together, and come to him out of every city,” he was naturally induced to draw the attention of his disciples to the various degrees of effect, which his doctrines would have upon the different dispositions of mankind; and this we find that he accomplished in the parable of the sower.

“A sower,” said he, “went forth to sow his seed, and as he sowed, some fell by the way—

“ way-side, and it was trodden down, and the
“ fowls of the air devoured it; and some fell
“ upon a rock, and as soon as it was sprung up,
“ it withered away, because it lacked moisture;
“ and some fell among thorns, and the thorns
“ sprang up with it, and choked it; and other
“ fell on good ground, and sprang up, and
“ bare fruit an hundred fold.”—“ And when
“ he had said these things, he cried, He that
“ hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

This concluding observation of our Lord, which he appears to have intended as an excitement of the particular attention of his hearers, produced such an effect upon their minds as he wished; for they, not comprehending precisely his meaning, “ asked him, “ saying, What might this parable be?— “ And he said, Unto you it is given to know “ the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but “ to others in parables; that seeing they “ might not see, and hearing they might not “ understand;” that the means of religious instruction which are afforded them, should require the exertion of their own industry and endeavours,

endeavours, in order to turn to their advantage, and that if these should be wanting, those might be diminished and withdrawn. The disciples, on the contrary, who were disposed to improve the opportunities with which his goodness furnished them, should be indulged with the amplest additional information and direction; which we find that in the present case, he delivered in the most implicit terms. "Now the parable," said he, "is this: The seed is the word of God; those by the way-side, are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." The persons here described, are wicked and abandoned men; such as have already suffered the devil to obtain an habitual influence over their minds; whose wills are converted to him, and whose practice is an uniform concession to his temptations. In minds like these, the seed is totally lost. The devil taketh it away, and not the least trace of it remains. Divine grace resisted, abandons it entirely, and nothing but diabolical influences predominate there.

there. A state of moral insensibility and barrenness, which is very aptly represented by the beaten ground along the highway, into which the seed never entering, is bruised by the feet of men, or picked up by the birds.

“ They on the rock, are they, which when
“ they hear, receive the word with joy ; and
“ these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall
“ away.” This description answers to persons of a thoughtless, indolent, inconstant disposition, who will never take the trouble of examining what is offered them, but receiving every thing upon trust, at the first moment, and as readily renounce it, when required ; who, when invited from within and without, by the spiritual and written word of God, to eschew evil, and follow after righteousness, listen at the instant, assent to the proposition, but never think of it again ; and as soon as they are assailed by temptations, and there appears to be a difficulty in the discharge of their duty, leave the rugged paths of virtue, and follow that way which is the safest and least laborious. The seed in them, actually
obtains

obtains its first spring. Their professions are good, and their practice decent, but they have no depth or strength of mind, no resolution, and no steady principles of conduct; while their professions and practice are fashionable, and approved by the society around them, they may possibly adhere to them; but when they are at all singular, and exposed either to the ridicule, or the persecution of the world, without waiting to enquire which is the right, without resolution to oppose the wrong, if even it was known, they take the bent of its humours, obey its suggestions, and follow its examples, without caring any thing for the consequences.

“But that which fell among thorns, are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.” The allusion is here clearly made to men of worldly, carnal minds. The cares and pursuits which occupy them, are compared to thorns in the parable, not only because of their pernicious efficacy in choking the word, but because that it is with great difficulty

difficulty that they are eradicated; and the hearers of this denomination are distinguished from those who receive the seed on stony ground, not so much by the effect of the word upon their minds, as by the different natures of each; “for in both the seed sprang up, but brought forth no fruit.” The stony ground hearers are incapable of retaining the impressions made by the word, because they have no root in themselves; whereas the thorny ground hearers have the soil, but so filled with the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the love of pleasures, that it becomes in the issue as unfruitful as the former. They receive the word into hearts pre-occupied and pre-engaged. The message of salvation which it brings, is no more to them than any other tidings. ‘It is a serious concern,’ they will say, ‘and deserves to be attended to.’ They will say so, indeed; but there ends their attention to it. They go forth to the world they belong to, wholly absorbed in its seductions, and have not a moment, a thought, or an affection to bestow on other matters. If the business of religion can go
on

on consistently with every other pursuit to
 which they are attached, it is very well. If
 the seed can grow among the thorns, let it
 grow and flourish; but if it requires any thing
 to give way to it—if the ground must be
 cleared and cultivated—farewell religion! and
 perish the labours of the sower! Some of
 these will tell you, if you urge them on the
 subject of their spiritual interests; ‘We do
 not deny that things are as you represent
 them; and perhaps a time may come when
 we will give them our attention; but at
 present our temporal concerns are so urgent
 and necessary, that we have not leisure to
 bestow on such matters. Important en-
 gagements, distressing times, and large fa-
 milies, call for our earliest care. When old
 age overtakes us, and we are no longer able
 to bustle about the world, or to make profit
 of our labours, our heads will be cooler, and
 our hearts more disengaged, and then we
 may dedicate the evening of our lives to seri-
 ous reflection.’ In the same spirit of evasion,
 the votaries of pleasure will put off the ques-
 tion to another opportunity. At present they

say, that they belong to this world, and that it is time enough, when they are about to leave it, to think of another; that if they neglect their duty in some instances, and indulge themselves in sinful gratifications in others, they trust in the mercy of God, to forgive their deficiencies and offences, and mean to repent very sincerely of them all, when they are no longer capable of renewing them with delight. Among thorns, indeed, the seed is sown with such men; and little need we wonder, that “they bring no fruit to perfection.” They can have nothing to do with a religion which declares that we cannot serve God and mammon, and commands us to cut off a right hand, and pluck out a right eye, if it offends and obstructs the performance of our duty, under pain of having our whole body cast into hell fire, as a just penalty for retaining a corrupt or useless member.

But what are they on the good ground?
“They are those, who in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” Observe the description

description here given by our Lord himself of the requisites which are necessary to our maturing the seed which he plants in us by his gospel. It is no fund of learning, no extraordinary reach of understanding, no splendid abilities which are important to this purpose. The grand desideratum is an honest and a good heart; a heart disposed candidly to acknowledge its deficiencies, humbly to implore the divine assistance to supply them, and diligently to make use of the graces which are bestowed upon it: such a heart will most assuredly keep the word and hold it fast, in direct opposition to those who received the seed by the way-side, and admitted it only on the surface, exposed to be destroyed or carried away; and it will bring forth fruit with patience, unlike the stony and the thorny grounds, which nourished the seed that was cast into them, only for awhile, till the sun arose to wither, and the thorns sprang up to choke it. Such is the parable considered in all its parts. Let us now proceed to make such reflections on it, as may render it useful to us all.

1. In the first place we see, that the seed or word of God is sown in every soil; that every man has the means of acting right placed within his reach, to be improved or neglected, according to his own free will and choice. Even those who have never heard of Christ, have a monitor within them, which preaches their duty to them, in the spirit of his gospel of righteousness and peace; and within the limits of his church, where every inward suggestion is strengthened and confirmed by outward revelation, not a disciple exists, not Judas himself, but has had the means of conversion and amendment fully in his power; not one that falls short of them, who has any to accuse, but his own perverse self, who, though visited by "the light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world,"—"has chosen darkness rather than light."

2. And when our reflections are turned to the several parts of the parable, we have reason to observe, in the case of the persons described, as receiving seed by the way-side, what a natural tendency vice and impiety have to harden the heart, and to render it
callous

callous to conviction. Thus it was among the Jews, that the most striking evidences given by our Lord, of the truth of his mission, and of its benevolence, and importance to the salvation of mankind, could make no impression upon their carnal and corrupt minds; and thus it is, that in the present day, the no less convincing proofs, which time, experience, and reason furnish, of the authenticity, expedience, and necessity of revelations, are lost upon men, who have given themselves up to sin, and have thereby become morally incapable of seeing the truth, and profiting by it.

3. The character of the thoughtless and careless hearers of the word, given under the idea of seed received upon stony ground, is too common an one not to be attended to, with particular observance. Few are the persons who set themselves openly to oppose revelation; but how is it that most receive it? merely by not rejecting it. The generality of men establish a kind of minor law of conduct, which if they observe, they think that they do every thing which their duty requires of them; a moral rule which may be

shadowed out from christianity, but which falls far short of it, and has hardly any thing of its substantial excellence. To render to every man his due, to ask no more than their own, and to be ready to do a good natural act when it falls in their way, is with them all that is necessary. But the rigid discipline and restraint which christianity and reason too, require to be exercised over our degenerate passions and inclinations, the habit of pouring out the soul to God, and of looking up to him for comfort, direction, and support upon every occasion; the heart-felt conviction of human infirmity, and the practical faith in the Redeemer, which thence arises, whose mediation is therefore acknowledged, because strongly felt, to be important to our salvation every moment of our lives. Every thing that is vital in religion, they know nothing of; and we may depend, that when temptation and persecution arise, they will be found to have no root in themselves, and will assuredly fall away. Such a lukewarm temper cannot be pleasing to God, and therefore is carefully to be guarded against. It becomes us all to search

search the Scriptures, to examine the claims of revelation upon our faith, to believe upon rational grounds, and when we have believed, to act like men, who are taught of God, and who must give a severe account of the advantages he has afforded them.

4. With respect to those persons who are described as absorbed by the cares and pleasures of this world, which like thorns choke the word, and prevent its bringing forth fruit, their example reads us a serious lesson of the danger of sacrificing too much of our time and attachment to its pursuits. The world is a tyrant, that never submits to a partial observance of its dictates. When once it has gained the upper hand of our affections, it is a difficult matter to wean them from it: and when we remember that here we have no continuing city; and are but strangers and pilgrims upon earth, who are travelling to another and a better country, and may arrive there we cannot tell how soon; it is clear that it must be absurd, as well as dangerous, to submit to such an infatuation.

5. How different are all these circumstances

from those of the man, who “in an honest
“and good heart having heard the word,
“keeps it, and brings forth his fruit with pa-
“tience.” In this instance, the seed meets
with no obstacles to its growth, from the un-
towardness or neglect of the soil. It is in it-
self fruitful. The hand of the owner protects
it from every noxious weed, and nipping
blast; the dew of heaven waters it; and in
due time it rewards the labours and the pati-
ence of the husbandman with a plentiful and
a golden harvest.

Let us, my brethren, be duly influenced
by this noble example. In our minds the
seed or word of God is sown already: may it
have fallen in good ground; at least, let it
not be our fault that it meets with an unfa-
vourable or uncultivated soil. Let us take
heed to root out the thorns of this life, which
we see are so apt to obstruct its growth; and
let us ever remember, that if we wish our
labours to be successful, they must be con-
stant and unremitted, that the fruit which
was brought to perfection, required patience
to arrive at maturity. Our reformation and
establishment

establishment in the practice of virtue and piety, are not to be accomplished in a moment. They constitute a progressive, not an instantaneous work. They require perseverance as well as activity, an habitual guard upon ourselves, a continual application to the throne of grace, and a watchful improvement of its gifts. Difficulties we shall undoubtedly meet with; but they are not insurmountable. Divine assistance awaits our endeavours and prayers, and success attends its interposition: our labours will end with this short, probationary life, and our blessed Lord, has in the next, prepared for every true and faithful disciple, a crown of glory and immortality, and an inheritance unfading in the heavens.

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Our labours will end with this short pro-
spect of life, and our blessed Lord, has in the
best prepared for every true and faithful dis-
ciple, a crown of glory and immortality, and
an inheritance undefiled in the heavens.

DISCOURSE XV.

THE LOST SHEEP.

LUKE XV. Ver. 7.

DISCOURSE XV.


THE LOVE-SHEEP.

LUKE XI. 17.

DISCOURSE XV.

ST. LUKE, Chap. xv. the 7th Verse.

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.



THE Evangelist St. Luke informs us, that “the publicans and sinners drew near unto our Lord for to hear him.” The sole profession of the publicans, and the former disorderly lives of the sinners, could be to him, who “knew no sin,” and was incapable of yielding to temptation, no possible reason for rejecting the advances they now made towards him, in order to listen to his doctrines; they were, on the contrary, circumstances which rendered him the more ready

to

to receive them, as persons who especially wanted his assistance, and were the most likely to acknowledge their necessities, and to embrace the means which they felt to be adequate to their relief: but this kind of motive was lost upon the Scribes and Pharisees, whose punctilious principles did not admit of their being seen in the company of the licentious, and where characters were not so unblemished, as to render such an association only assignable to the virtuous intention of reforming and amending them. They therefore, we find, “murmured against him, saying, “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with “them.” Uncharitable spirits like these could not bring themselves to suppose that the blessed Jesus, in accepting of these followers, could have no other design than to instruct, reprove, and convert them: uninfluenced by such heavenly principles themselves, they were incapable of acknowledging that they might predominate even in the mind of him, whose whole life should have convinced them, that he only “went about “doing good.”

Such

Such unprovoked and unjust suspicion of his conduct, was enough to have roused a spirit less divine than his. But he, we know, was out of the reach of passion and resentment; and his reply, which one might have expected to be caustic and severe, was only a beautiful parabolical representation of the goodness and mercy of God towards mankind, exerted to reclaim them, in their most profligate and abandoned condition. “And he
 “spake this parable unto them; What man
 “of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose
 “one of them, doth not leave the ninety and
 “nine in the wilderness, and go after that
 “which is lost, until he find it? And, when
 “he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoul-
 “ders rejoicing. And when he cometh
 “home, he calleth together his friends and
 “neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with
 “me, for I have found my sheep which was
 “lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall
 “be in heaven over one sinner that repent-
 “eth, more than over ninety and nine just
 “persons which need no repentance.” The
 subsequent parable of the piece of money lost
 and

and found, is precisely the same in its tendency, and only differs in the mode of expression used in the clause parallel to that of my text: "Likewise I say unto you, that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth:" which in fact amounts to the same thing.

The general tendency of the parable, considered with a reference to the occasion of its being delivered, and to the person delivering it, evidently is to shew the merciful spirit of the gospel, and the goodness of God towards the sinner, who repents of the evil he has done, who wishes to be forgiven, and who determines to amend in future; and this exhibited by an allusion to the incidents of common life, very happily adapted to strike the minds of the most illiterate of his hearers, with the full force of his meaning.

But we are not to suppose that an exact parallel is to be run, between every part of the parable, and every particular of the divine conduct towards men: for this mode of interpretation, in the case of any parabolical representation, would lead us into a variety of errors.

rors: it is the general effect of the whole which is to be attended to, and which, in every such case, will lead us to the truth.

1. Thus, though the shepherd, who had lost one sheep, is described as leaving ninety and nine in the wilderness, exposed of course to a variety of accidents; we are not to imagine that the grace of God, in its merciful endeavours to reclaim the sinner, ever neglects the more virtuous and innocent of his creatures, or leaves them to any misfortune whatever, unheeded and unprotected as the shepherd's flock in the parable.

2. In like manner, when those who need no repentance are exhibited to us as the "ninety and nine," and the sinners who require it, are considered only as "one," we are not to suppose that the number of the righteous bears so large a proportion to that of the wicked. The general experience of human corruption entirely contradicting so flattering a presumption. But this disparity of numbers appears to have been adopted merely to keep up the general idea of the transcendent goodness of God, and of the benevolent

spirit of the gospel ; as if our Lord had said, so abundant is God in mercy and loving kindness, that if the number of the obedient were as ninety nine, and that of the profligate and disobedient but as one, he would still pursue his scheme of salvation in behalf of that one, no less than of the ninety nine : agreeably to which doctrine we find the holy scriptures in many passages expressing the most anxious solicitude on the part of God towards all his creatures, describing him as willing that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth ; and in one particular instance of expostulation with the house of Israel, addressing them in terms most affectionate and tender ; “ Cast away from you
“ all your transgressions whereby ye have
“ transgressed, and make you a new heart,
“ and a new spirit : for why will ye die, O
“ house of Israel ? I have no pleasure in the
“ death of him that dieth, saith the Lord
“ God ; wherefore turn yourselves and live ;
“ when the wicked man turneth away from
“ his wickedness that he hath committed,
“ and doeth that which is lawful and right,
“ he

“ he shall save his soul alive : because he con-
“ sidereth and turneth away from all his
“ transgressions that he hath committed, he
“ shall surely live ; he shall not die : Repent
“ and turn yourselves from all your trans-
“ gressions : so shall not iniquity be your
“ ruin.”

3. With no less caution are we to interpret the meaning of the declaration of my text, that “ there is joy likewise in heaven
“ over one sinner that repenteth, more than
“ over ninety and nine just persons that need
“ no repentance.” The mirth of the shepherd, upon finding the wanderer from his flock, was the tumultuous exultation of a man, surrounded by his friends and neighbours, in a moment of success and triumph. But the joy in heaven over the repenting sinner can be nothing like this : the joy that is in the presence of the angels of God, whether it refers to God himself, or to those blessed spirits, can have no such meaning : this is only to keep up the allegory, and to assimilate, as far as possible, the divine procedure to the standard of our condition and

comprehension: the God of Love is no doubt interested in the welfare of all his creatures, and must, no doubt, be pleased to see the means of grace which he affords, accepted and improved by the returning sinner: but his joy is not liable to tumult, intemperance or excess: all is perfection with him; and his happiness, in the energy of that universal perfection, is incapable of diminution or increase: and if we attribute the joy here mentioned, to the angels only, we must still exclude every thing that is turbulent and irregular: no doubt they are interested in what befalls us, their fellow-creatures of another order, since they are described to us as “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation;” assuredly they rejoice when the sinner is rescued from ruin, and made an heir of salvation: but still their joy is the joy of the inhabitants of heaven! an emanation from that pure source of felicity, which to them descends from the throne of God himself!

4. Nor, when we are told that there is “more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,

“repenteth, than over ninety and nine just
“persons that need no repentance,” are we
to conceive that there is any partiality for the
repenting sinner, which excludes the better
part of men, from the favour and regard of
Heaven: ill would such an apprehension ac-
comodate itself to the various declarations of
scripture in commendation of virtue, and
disapprobation of vice: the whole observation
is a concession to the nature and temper of
human feelings, in cases like that in question.
There is in our minds a greater anxiety and
solicitude for what we are in danger of losing,
than for things of infinitely greater value, of
which we have the quiet and uninterrupted
possession. Not that we are more attached to
the one than to the other, but that our feel-
ings are roused in behalf of the thing which
is in jeopardy, and that they are dormant
and moderate with respect to that which is
securely our own: ask the parent, whom Hea-
ven has blest with a numerous offspring, who
all engage, and all deserve, equally his tender-
ness and affection; ask him at the moment
when his heart, which has bled for the safety

of one of them, whom sickness had brought to the brink of the grave, begins to exult in the prospect of his recovery, if his joy is not greater on account of his restoration to health, than for the continuance of that of all the rest. But is this a proof that his affection is warmer for him than for all besides? assuredly not: he could have been equally alarmed, and equally exhilarated, had the same events taken place with either of them. The cause then of his greater joy is not assignable to greater attachment, but to the greater danger of losing one than the others, which being past, increases the satisfaction felt in its own proportion. Applying then these observations to the parable we are considering, we find that the joy over one sinner that repenteth, more than over the ninety-nine who did not require repentance, does not arise from his being an object of partial affection, but because the danger of his destruction enhances his retrieval; and, were God and angels susceptible of the emotion of human weakness, would produce an exultation, superior in degree, at the moment, to the uniform satisfaction

tion of viewing the progressive virtue of less faulty creatures : I say less faulty creatures, because that the expression of just persons, which need no repentance, can only mean to establish a parallel between the condition of the good, who are still subject to many and great imperfections, and that of the bad, whose sins are voluntary, flagrant, and habitual ; unless that we suppose our Lord to allude to the self-sufficiency of the Scribes and Pharisees, who thought themselves to be just persons, who needed no repentance ; an interpretation which may, perhaps, give some additional force to the observation of my text.

But be this as it will, we may clearly gather from the passage, some important inferences, by way of application.

5. We may hence discover, that the Divine Goodness is indiscriminately exerted in behalf of all its creatures ; that the sinner, who leaves the path of duty, may be always sure of acceptance, if he treads back his guilty steps, sincerely repents of his past errors, and forbears to renew them in future. It is the

genius of the gospel, not only to receive, but to seek out, in order to save that which is lost. A thousand times does Divine Grace invite, exhort, beseech us to pursue the way which must end in our own everlasting happiness before it leaves us to ourselves; and never, till we have repeatedly rejected its advances, and rendered our minds callous to its impressions, does it abandon us to the corruptions of our nature, and to the miserable consequences which must result from their predominance.

6. But yet, let the sinner take heed how he builds upon this parable the delusive hope of salvation, at the same time, and notwithstanding, that he persists in his transgressions. It is the sinner that repenteth, and is reclaimed from his vices, in whose safety the inhabitants of heaven are interested. Though the gospel is a message of grace, the gift of free, unmerited goodness, its blessings are all intended as motives to repentance and moral amendment, and without them, will never terminate in our final and everlasting happiness. It is undoubtedly true, that it has
opened

opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers ; but still it is as true, that the only way to heaven is that of holiness. Our Lord has made a manifest difference between the called and the chosen : the called he tells us are many, but the chosen few ; not that he has chosen few, in contradiction to his calling of many, but that few will listen to his call, and render themselves fit to be of the number of the chosen : so that nothing can be so absurd, impious, and dangerous, as to infer from any thing that this or any other passage of Scripture may declare, concerning the mercy of God, that the practice of virtue is indifferent to our hopes of salvation. Our entrance into the kingdom of God upon earth, and our title to the privileges of it, are entirely of the free grace of God, through Jesus Christ, but our exaltation to its ennobled state in heaven, and our actual possession of those privileges which belong to it, must depend, in a great measure, upon our use of the means and opportunities which we thereby have of improving in moral goodness, and growing in grace ; and we shall find, to the cost of every hardened offender,

fender, that in the closing scene of the divine government of the world, the irreverfible doom of incorrigible and impenitent wickedness, will be weeping and gnashing of teeth ; and that the same Saviour who has declared, that there is “ joy in heaven over one sinner “ that repenteth, more than over ninety and “ nine just persons who need no repentance,” will himself pronounce and execute the sentence, that consigns the doers of evil to the devil and his angels.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XVI.

THE FIG-TREE CURSED.

MARK XI. Part of the 14th Verse.

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DISCOURSE XVI

THE FIG-TREE CURSED.

Mark xii. Part of the 14th Verse.

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DISCOURSE XVI.

ST. MARK, Chap. XI. Part of the 14th Verse.

*And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man
eat fruit of thee hereafter, for ever.*

THE passage of Scripture which has been just now read to you, is selected from the account of a very remarkable circumstance which happened to our Lord in the course of his ministry, of a very different import from that which has been sometimes assigned to it.

The narrative of the Evangelist runs in the following words:—"On the morrow," says he, "when they were come from Bethany, he "was hungry; and seeing a fig-tree afar off, "having leaves, he came, if haply he might "find any thing thereon. And when he "came to it, he found nothing but leaves; "for the time of figs was not yet. And
"Jesus

“ Jesus answered and said unto it, No man
“ eat fruit of thee hereafter, for ever; and
“ his disciples heard it: and in the morning,
(of the following day) as they passed by,
“ they saw the fig-tree was dried up from
“ the roots.”

It has been objected to this account, that it is replete ‘ with a spirit of resentment and in-
‘ justice, very unworthy the character of our
‘ Lord; first, in his having doomed to bar-
‘ renness, an innocent, or at least a senseless
‘ tree, for not having wherewithal to gratify
‘ an unruly appetite; and secondly, because
‘ the sentence was past at a season, when he
‘ had no right to expect that he should find
‘ fruit upon it.

In replying to these objections, we must observe, that the whole affair was figurative; and being transacted with senseless, inanimate matter, leaves the charge of undue resentment, on our Lord’s part, entirely groundless and unsupported: and as to the injustice of the sentence, a moment’s reflection will shew that this is inferred from a sense affixed to the passage, which is by no means essential to it.

it. The time of figs signifying as well the time of gathering, as that of producing figs; which being still ungathered, gave our Lord the greater reason to appear to conclude, that some were to be found on a tree so luxuriantly covered with leaves. I say to appear to conclude, because it is not credible, that he, who with a word could arrest all the vegetative power, and reduce a flourishing tree to a sapless trunk, could have been ignorant of its barrenness, when at a little distance from it. The transaction, it has been already observed, was entirely figurative; and the occasion of our Lord's being sensible of one of the necessities of his human nature on his journey, and the appearance of a tree under particular circumstances, became a very happy opportunity of shewing to his disciples the impending fate of the Jews, who, though in the enjoyment of the fairest advantages, and with the most specious pretences to religion, were destitute of all the fruits which those advantages should have produced among persons who had the reality, and not the show of piety in their principles and conduct; and

and who, at that very time, were giving the most striking proofs of their spiritual barrenness, by wantonly rejecting the wonderful offers of salvation he was making them, through his own mediation, and were even plotting his death, for no other cause, than because he endeavoured to shew them the folly and danger of their ways, and to bring them back again to their duty to God.

It is farther to be remarked, that we have no reason to cavil at this interpretation of his meaning, on the score of his not having himself explained it to his disciples, since we have repeated instances of his delivering parables to them, without adding any solution to the narrative. It is then highly probable, that this was the design which he had in view, in fixing their thoughts on a tree, which in itself, could not have had any thing to obtain his favour, or incur his displeasure in the smallest degree.

Nothing can tend more directly to shew us the unwearied attention of our Lord, in discharging the duties of his ministry, than the transaction before us. Ever studious to in-
graft

graft his doctrines upon the minds of his hearers, he availed himself of every little circumstance or event which presented itself to illustrate some important truth, by an allusion easy to be understood, and well adapted in every respect, to excite their curiosity, and interest their feelings. Thus it was, that the occupations of husbandry, with the various contingencies annexed to it (all which were likely to pass in his, and their sight, during the different peregrinations of his active life) gave occasion to many of the parables, which are attributed to him by the historians of the New Testament; and thus too, in the present instance, the sight of a fig-tree, richly cloathed with leaves, but destitute of fruit, furnished an opportunity for him to inculcate a truth of the utmost importance to his disciples, in every succeeding age of his kingdom.

The immediate import of the transaction we have seen, concerned the nation of the Jews, from whom, for their disobedience and obstinacy, "the kingdom of God was to be taken, and given to a nation bringing forth
f " the

“the fruits thereof;” and they themselves involved in a ruin and destruction, as compleat as that to which * their typical tree was consigned. But this is not the only meaning which it is capable of conveying. Our Lord has therein given a very solemn warning to all those, who under a fair shew of piety and religion, possess none of the substantials of either, and therefore bring forth none of the genuine fruits to be expected from them. Hipocrisy is a vice which carries itself with peculiar insolence towards God, as it can derive no hopes to itself, but in the possibility of deceiving him; in its realizing the presumptuous idea of possessing powers of concealment, superior to the powers of discernment; and in its relation to men, it is the most odious and detestable than can be conceived. The vices it indulges in secret, assume a deeper dye, by being seen through the veil of its impudent pretences; the virtues it lays claim to, are scouted and rejected by the wiser and better part of mankind, as destitute

* Origin calls it το δένδρον του λαου.

of solidity, and founded upon fraud; while in the eyes of the ignorant, the weak and the licentious, they serve only to stigmatize the reality, by the disgusting appearance of the counterfeit. The cause of religion in particular, suffers considerably, by being supposed to admit of such a defender. How many an unjust flier has been cast upon it, when an unfavourable comparison has been drawn between professions and practices which appeared inconsistent with each other. 'If these be the fruits of religion,' it has been said, 'if it be so immoral, or at best, so feeble a guide, we had better be without it.' Hence it is, that it is so common to hear men talk, as if religion and morality were separate rules of conduct, which had no necessary connection together. A conception which could not have been so generally taken up; which perhaps had never been entertained at all, had not hypocrisy assumed the garb, the gesture, and the language of the one, while she totally neglected and despised the substantial excellencies of the other. Odious, however, as this vice is, the seeds of it are deeply

f 2

planted

planted in human nature. There are few of us who will take the trouble to be good, while almost all of us wish to appear so; and wherever this wish is not seconded by endeavours to attain the qualities we would be thought to possess, there a proportionable share of hypocrisy must be lurking in the constitution. Among the Jews, it seems to have been extremely predominant in our Saviour's time. The Scribes and Pharisees were in general affected with it, in a very high degree indeed. Rigorous and severe, punctilious and exact in the observance of the ceremonials of their law, their private lives exhibited an uniform system of opposition to all its moral precepts and requisitions. Persons of such a cast as this, were peculiarly obnoxious to our Lord's animadversions, and accordingly we may, from his rebukes to them, clearly discern, how detestable in his sight, and of course, how contrary to the spirit and hopes of Christianity, the vice of hypocrisy must be:—"Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," said he to them; "for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence,

“ tence, make long prayer ; therefore shall ye
“ receive the greater damnation : Woe unto
“ you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for
“ ye pay tithe of mint and cummin, and have
“ omitted the weightier matters of the law,
“ judgment, mercy, and faith. Woe unto
“ you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for
“ ye make clean the outside of the cup and
“ of the platter, but within, they are full of
“ extortion and excess. Woe unto you,
“ Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye
“ are like unto whited sepulchres, which
“ indeed appear beautiful outward, but with-
“ in, are full of dead men’s bones, and of all
“ uncleanness. Ye serpents, ye generation
“ of vipers ! how can ye escape the damna-
“ tion of hell !” Such were our Lord’s de-
nunciations against Jewish hypocrites. But let
us not suppose that they were exclusively ad-
dressed to them. His woes, we may be assured,
were launched against Christian Scribes and
Pharisees, as well as against those who
swarmed in Jerusalem : however specious
their outward demeanor may be, however
dazzling to the superficial gaze of men, there

is an eye which can see through all their palliations; there is a hand which will punish all their deficiencies which they have endeavoured to conceal indeed, but not to correct. Punish, did I say? Has not our Lord given us reason to apprehend that they shall "receive greater damnation," for having pretended to virtue, without really possessing it, than if they had openly avowed their apostasy, and given no pretext for men to mistake their designs, or to blaspheme the truth, which they dishonoured by counterfeiting. Not that the hardened and presumptuous sinner has any thing to alledge in excuse for himself; but that the hypocrite has added to the guilt of the other's sins, his own peculiar offence of having made an habitual mockery of God, by the duplicity of his conduct. Both are equally his enemies; but the latter has not only insulted him by being really his enemy, but also by pretending to be his friend; and will therefore be doubly punished, in proportion to this aggravation of his demerit.

The history of the fig-tree will not a little contribute to illustrate this part of the subject.

My

My text in particular, which contains the sentence pronounced against it by our Lord, will deserve our serious attention:—"Let
"no man eat fruit of thee hereafter, for
"ever." The consequence of this, we find to be, that the "tree was dried up from the
"roots;" that is to say, that it sustained the greatest misfortune of which its nature was capable. Stript of the leafy honours, which had exhausted all its powers of vegetation, it was for ever deprived of the possibility of deceiving the passenger into the idea of its fruitfulness, by the beauty of its appearance. The hypocrite, in like manner, will be everlastingly deprived of those opportunities of moral improvement, which he has so long sacrificed to the diabolical occupation of imposing on the world, and be adjudged to a punishment which will compel him, by the agonies it inflicts, loudly to proclaim the folly of those deceptive arts, in which he has been priding himself to his own ruin. The nature and extent of that punishment it is impossible to define. None, indeed, but those whose hope is "dried up from the roots," can form the

most distant conception of it. This, however, we may be assured, that it will be pre-eminently severe, since our Lord, in describing the doom of another class of offenders, has thought proper to enforce the terrors of it, by declaring that their "portion should be appointed with the hypocrites;" and that "there should be weeping and gnashing of teeth." This comparison conveys the strongest idea that it is possible for us to entertain on the subject; and will, I trust, have sufficient weight to convince you of the danger of neglecting the reality, for the appearance of virtue. Even in this world, hypocrisy seldom obtains the end which it proposes. Detection, infamy, abhorrence, and reproach, are generally the fruits which it reaps from its laborious efforts to deceive mankind; but were it even assured of success, one would think that the indubitable certainty, that every thing is fully known unto God, and that he will positively punish offenders under every form they may assume, must prove, that at any rate, the "joy of the hypocrite"

“hypocrite” can only “be for a moment,” the joy of living in the habitual practice of a lie, under the necessity of heaping deceit upon deceit, in order to retain a place in society, which he only possesses by not being known, and by being mistaken for the very opposite of what he really is; and under the conviction of being finally doomed to the torments of an immortality of woe.

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DISCOURSE XVII.

*DANGER OF LOOKING BACK FROM
THE PLOUGH.*

(IN A SCRIPTURAL SENSE.)

LUKE IX. Ver. 62.

DISCOURS XVII

THE ART OF LOOKING AHEAD

(ON MORTALITY)

LECTURE 10

DISCOURSE XVII.

ST. LUKE, Chap. ix. the 62d Verse.

*No man having put his hand to the plough, and
looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*

THESE words of our blessed Lord, the Evangelist informs us, were used upon a particular occasion, when some persons who professed an inclination to become his disciples, were forming different pretexts for deferring the execution of their intentions to a future season. The account he gives us of the affair, is as follows:—" And it came to pass, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee, whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man

l a h

“hath not where to lay his head.” This candid declaration made by our Lord of the straitened condition of his temporal fortunes, seems to have greatly chilled the ardour of many of those who had been before inclined, from interested motives, to have enlisted, as they thought, under the triumphant banners of an earthly hero ; for we are told, that when he said unto another, “ Follow me ;” the answer he received was, “ Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.”—“ Suffer me to remain at home, until the death of my father shall put me in the possession of his property ; and when I have arranged my concerns, I will then obey your call.”—“ But Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury the dead ; but go thou, and preach the kingdom of God.”—“ Let those who are yet “ dead in trespasses and sins,” and are too far enslaved by the world to forsake all and follow me ; let them wait at home for the death of parents, and the succession of estates : but do thou, if sincerely inclined to be my disciple, consider the obligations and the business of embracing, and propagating

‘gating the gospel, as far superior to any
‘considerations of temporal interest and ad-
‘vantage.’—“And another also said, Lord,
“I will follow thee; but let me first go bid
“them farewell which are at home.”—‘Per-
‘mit me to cast back one lingering look upon
‘my worldly attachments, and then, if I can,
‘I will bid them adieu, and return to you.’—
“And Jesus said unto him, No man having
“put his hand to the plough, and looking
“back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”—“As
‘the ploughman, who, following his plough,
‘looks back upon any occasion whatsoever,
‘cannot fail to interrupt and spoil his work,
‘so he, who having taken up the cross, is
‘discouraged by its hardships and difficulties,
‘or is drawn away by the pleasures and vani-
‘ties of the world, from bearing it through
‘life, is not fit for, nor will be admitted to
‘enter into the kingdom of God.’

The method adopted by our Lord, of repre-
senting truths of a sublime and spiritual na-
ture, by objects of external sense, was entire-
ly conformable to the practice of the eastern
nations, who were remarkably fond of alle-
gorical

gorical allusions. It was, besides, a most obvious and easy one, to convey his instructions to the minds of his hearers, who were men of every rank and condition; and many of them, persons whose knowledge must have been confined within the limits prescribed by a life of manual labour, and mechanical industry. To such persons, what could be more strikingly affecting than to have him fix upon some object which was at the moment present before their eyes; and upon that view, to graft some moral truth of the same serious import, and carry it home to their hearts, clearly, succinctly, and forcibly expressed. Thus it was, that sometimes he represented the planting and growth of the gospel by the labours of a sower, a vine-dresser, or a fisherman; and thus the spectacle, perhaps of a farmer following his plough, and bending over it, with his eyes directed forward to the accurate arrangement of his furrows, might have suggested the expression which occurred in my text, "No man having put
"his hand to the plough, and looking back,
"is fit for the kingdom of God."

In

In descending to a particular discussion of this passage of Scripture, many circumstances occur which deserve our especial attention.

1. In the first place, we find the profession of the gospel represented by putting ones hand to the plough; i. e. 'by the undertaking of a work of labour and fatigue, which has, moreover, no other difficulty than what industry and application may easily surmount.' This character is admirably descriptive of the nature of Christianity; which is by no means a service which costs us nothing, but yet requires only such an exertion of our endeavours, as must be entirely in the power of us all. It calls upon us to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to devote ourselves to obey the will of God, as he has been pleased to reveal it to us, for our direction in his holy gospel. It pre-supposes at the same time, that the world abounds with seductions which are difficult to be resisted; that the flesh is corrupted with wicked inclinations and propensities, which are but too ready to close with them; and that the devil is always upon the watch to improve every favourable
t opportunity

opportunity of giving strength to the one, and urging on the other; but it takes care most explicitly to warn us of the dangers which surround us, and to exhort us to be constantly upon our guard; to mistrust ourselves, and to pray to our heavenly Father to assist our weakness with the saving help of his holy spirit; and it promises, moreover, that he will actually bestow on us this inestimable grace, if we ask it with sincerity and humility of heart, and do our best to concur with it, in all its blessed purposes of leading us, first to holiness and then to happiness. But it is as far as possible from giving the least encouragement to the idle, the indifferent, and the presumptuous disciple. It bids us "put our hand to the plough," if we wish that our harvest should be blest with the favour of God; and expressly assures us, that the sanctification of the spirit will never be bestowed on the profligate and the abandoned; and that without that sanctification, the redemption which has been purchased for men by the Son of God can have no possible reference to them.

2. The next particular which occurs in my text, is the circumstance of “putting our hand to the plough, and looking back;” and this seems to describe two principal defaults in Christian duty.

First, ‘The being diverted by worldly pleasures and pursuits from devoting ourselves to God and religion.’—This is indeed “looking back” in the most positive sense, from the path of our duty: for it is a most incontestable fact, that no one, who is immersed in the pleasures and the business of this life, can have a true relish for the pleasures, or can properly attend to the business of the gospel. By this I would be understood to mean, that no man who considers the concerns of this life, in any light of preference or priority to those of the next, or who is involved in the habit of acting as if he so considered; (for many a one enters on, and pursues a plan of conduct without the least reflection upon its tendencies;) that such a man as this cannot possibly be interested in the business and pleasures of religion: and if he may be said to have ever “put his hand

“to the plough,” he may with the greatest truth be affirmed to “look back” from it. It is but too common for us to suppose that we may be religious and worldly at the same time; that we may serve God, and indulge ourselves, without incurring any risque or danger; but this is a very grievous mistake. Our Lord has assured us, that we cannot “serve God and mammon;” and bids us renounce every thing that has a tendency to divert our attention, and to weaken or wean our affections from him, however dear to ourselves; though even dear and valuable as a right eye, or a right hand: otherwise we are only his disciples by halves, or rather only in name; and therefore cannot pretend to any of the realities which belong to those who are truly, sincerely, and entirely devoted to his service. ‘This,’ you may say, ‘is requiring a great deal:’—I grant it; but remember what it is you are striving to obtain, and what to avoid. To obtain an eternity of happiness; to avoid an eternity of misery! What then, I would ask you, is more than adequate to ends so transcendently important?

Besides,

Besides, if you will set yourselves diligently to work, you will find that the hardship of the means proposed for attaining them is not in themselves, but in your own perverseness. No man who has brought himself to the habitual practice of virtue, and to an uniform resistance of the corrupt inclinations of his nature, but finds infinite satisfaction and comfort in such a plan of conduct; a satisfaction and comfort which are only interrupted by his deviating from it; and which he would not, at any rate, exchange for the highest pleasures, and the most extensive gratifications of sin; though he should be secured against the remorse of his conscience, or the displeasure of his Maker.

Another sense in which we may be said to “put our hand to the plough, and to look back,” is ‘when from pride, presumption, and self-sufficiency, we think so highly of our present acquirements in religion, as to suppose we have nothing still to do to work out our salvation.’—Never, since the time that “the word was made flesh and dwelt among us,” has there lived a man who had

a right to conceive that he had gone far enough, and need go no farther, in his Christian progress. While a temptation remains unresisted, or a frail propensity exists unrepessed, our work is incomplete; nay, the very pride and self-sufficiency which induce us to flatter ourselves it is finished, are dispositions which themselves must be subdued, before it can be otherwise than deficient in a very important particular. The truth is, that however great our proficiency may be, we must ever be short of perfection. We can hardly presume that at any period of our lives, we shall have less reason than St. Paul, to "count ourselves not to have apprehended, "or forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things "which are before, to press toward the mark "for the prize of the high calling of God in "Christ Jesus;" and we may safely conclude that he, who in opposition to his example, sits down contented, with the idea of having already apprehended, at any stage of the race that is set before him, is guilty of "looking back, and is not fit for the kingdom of God."

3. From

3. From this view of the different meanings of "putting our hand to the plough, and "looking back," we may easily believe that he who betrays such inconsistency of conduct as is therein described, cannot be "fit for the kingdom of God;" is deficient in the performance of its express precepts and duties, and is wholly unworthy to obtain its promises; about which he has been so shamefully indifferent, as to postpone the performance of the conditions annexed to them, to the most disgraceful, ignoble, and trifling pursuits. He is therefore morally "unfit for the kingdom of God," and most justly excluded from its citizenship and privileges.

Let us then, my brethren, who have put our hand to the plough, who have embraced the profession of Christianity, take heed how we look back, either by an inordinate attachment to this world, or by a presumptuous confidence in our past acquirements, and a consequent neglect of what we have still to do, lest we incur the dreadful sentence of our Lord; that we are not fit for the kingdom of God. Let us recollect how direful a

meaning is contained in that declaration ; and let us do our utmost to be exempted from it, by acting up to the truth and reality of the profession we have made. Let us be Christians in deed, as well as in the word ; and may we all, at length obtain, through the mercies of our adorable Redeemer, an admittance into the kingdom of God, and an inheritance unfading in the heavens,

DISCOURSE XVIII.

*CAUSELESS ANGER, RIDICULE, AND
CALUMNY, CONDEMNED.*

MATTHEW, v. Ver. 21 and 22.

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF KING CHARLES THE FIRST

BY JOHN BURNET

IN TWO VOLUMES

LONDON

Printed by J. Streater, at the

Sign of the Gun, in St. Dunstons Church-yard

DISCOURSE XVIII.

OF THE

CAUSES WHICH BROUGHT ON

THE CIVIL WAR

IN GREAT BRITAIN

IN THE YEAR 1642

AND

THE

REASON WHY

THE

PARLIAMENT

WAS

DRIVEN

TO

WAR

WITH

THE

KING

DISCOURSE XVIII.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. v. the 21st and 22d Verses.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill: and whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council†: but whosoever*

* The judgment was a particular court among the Jews, consisting of twenty-three members, which, before the Roman Government was established in Judea, had the power of life and death so far as its jurisdiction extended, and punished criminals with strangling and beheading.
M^c. Night.

† The Jewish Sanhedrim, (from the Greek *συνηδριον*, which is used in the original) or supreme council, whose business was to judge in the most important affairs; in religious

ever shall say, Thou fool! shall be in danger of † hell fire.

OUR blessed Saviour, during his residence at Capernaum, having, by his preaching and miracles, assembled a great multitude of followers, took advantage of this opportunity of his doctrines being extensively useful, to address a long discourse to them, wherein he clearly laid down the principles of Christian morality, and aimed a severe blow at those prejudices which the Jews had imbibed from ancient traditions, and blind guides; exhibiting at the same time, a striking contrast between the Mosaic dispensation, disfigured by human corruptions, and his own

religious matters, in the pretensions of any new prophets, in any innovations attempted to be made in the established worship, and in all similar concerns, and who could, while the republic lasted, inflict the heaviest punishments, particularly stoning, and pouring melted lead down the throat of the criminal, after being half strangled.—Ibid.

† See the body of the sermon, and from thence refer to M. Night's note in loc: in his harmony.

pure

pure system, immediately delivered by himself.

The verses which have been just read to you contain an instance of the latter observation: the law of God had expressly forbidden murder: the Jewish doctors finding it impossible to destroy so positive an ordinance, endeavoured to evade it by the most artful modifications: the prohibition they restrained to the taking away the life of another by one's own hand: the procuring his death by other means, according to them, was not murder in the eye of the law, however it may deserve the judgment of God.

But the gospel, which was designed to inculcate a sublimer plan of conduct, the true sense and genuine spirit of that law, which its Jewish followers considered only in a carnal light, extended it to every thing which could injure a fellow creature, and be construed to proceed from a principle, which, in a higher degree, might invade his right of existence. It is, moreover, to be remarked, that while the Mosaic law, which specifically marked out only the act of murder itself, when

when done, threatened to the commission of it a temporal punishment alone: the law of Christ assigned to causeless anger as heavy a punishment, and even an heavier, since it evidently intended, in my text, to tipify a degree of eternal penalty; in the same manner as the two succeeding penalties which attributed to other exertions of the murderous spirit, signify two greater degrees of eternal punishment; which after all, are allotted to crimes, which, in their consequences with respect to the injured person, fall far short of depriving him of his life.

Having thus briefly considered my text, in a comparative sense, I proceed to discuss it in a positive one; accordingly I propose,

Ist. To examine into the nature of the three gradations of criminal conduct laid down in the twenty-second verse, (to which the following reflections will be confined) and to shew that the denunciation of punishments assigned to them, whatever they may be in themselves, intends to describe a series, rising in proportion to the correspondent actions, for which they are inflicted. And

Idly.

Idly. To make a practical application of the meaning of my text, explained under my first head, in order to the direction and improvement of your conduct as Christians.

To consider then my first head.

Ist. 1. The first gradation of criminal conduct, we find thus laid down by our blessed Saviour;—"Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment." This is one of the least considerable effects of the spirit, which is condemned by the Christian interpretation of the Mosaic law concerning murder, and to it is assigned the punishment of the judgment, which, in its original meaning, intends a particular court among the Jews, armed with the power of life and death, in a certain degree and kind; and in its extended sense, must signify a gradation of punishment in the life to come, which, with respect to other degrees, may be represented by that which the judgment used to inflict. This offence consists in the indulgence of a petulant spirit, easily fired, and very capable of producing the most dangerous effects.

2. The

2. The second kind of criminal conduct, with its punishment, is thus described; "Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, "shall be in danger of the council:" Raca is a Syriac word of contempt and derision. The meaning of the passage then must be, that whosoever shall presume to affront his brother, by causeless ridicule and satirical jesting, shall be subject to punishment, in a degree which may be represented by that which the council used to inflict; the supreme court among the Jews, which had the cognisance of religious concerns, and the power of inflicting the heaviest penalties.

3. The third gradation is expressed by, "Whosoever shall say, thou fool! shall be "in danger of hell fire:" and here we are not to understand the words, Thou fool! in the sense which they commonly bear, but in such an one as they are capable of receiving more consistently with the general tenor of the passage. As virtue and religion are the highest wisdom, so vice and impiety are the extremity of folly; for we are expressly taught in Scripture that "the fear of God is the be-

"ginning

“ginning of wisdom, and to depart from
 “evil is understanding;” and that it is “the
 “fool who hath said in his heart, there is no
 “God.” He therefore, in the sense of my
 text, saith unto his brother, Thou fool,
 who unjustly calumniates him as an apostate
 from religion; or in any respect judges unrea-
 sonably of his conduct, and the motives of it.
 He who is guilty of this offence is subject to
 a “* Gehenna of fire,” to a degree of punish-
 ment in another world, which may be fitly
 represented by the fiery Gehenna, by the fire
 of the valley of Hinnom or Tophet, once the
 scene of the detestable sacrifices of Molock,
 whose horrid altar was polluted with the
 blood of the Israelitish children, and after-
 wards remarkable for constant fires, which
 were kept up in it, to consume the unburied
 carcases and filth of the city of Jerusalem,
 that being thus defiled, it might be unfit for
 any future celebration of the like religious
 abominations. The Jews, from the perpe-
 tuity of these flames, and in testimony of

* *Ενχος ἔσται εἰς τὴν γέεναν τοῦ πυρός.* Original.

their detestation of the sacrifices which had been offered in this valley, made use of its name to signify Gehenna or Hell; and our Lord under this last word, alludes to that place of the greatest horror in the Jewish estimation, in order to describe an aggravated state of punishment, proportionate to the greater guilt which belongs to calumny, compared with ridicule.

And here, having circumstantially explained the words of my text, it will not be improper to add one more observation upon the object, against whom the crimes in question may be committed, namely, against a brother, not merely a natural brother, but a fellow creature, a brother, in the Christian sense of the word; a fellow member of that body into which we are all incorporated, and of which the head is Christ: so that the offences here defined, and threatened with particular punishments, may be committed against any individual of the same community, with as much turpitude and danger, as against any, the nearest to us, in the scale of human relationship and consanguinity.

Which

Which leads me to my
IId head; wherein I proposed to apply to
your practice, what should previously have
been stated.

According to what has been just now laid
down in explanation of my text, we find that
it takes notice of three crimes, as being hein-
ous in the sight of God, and by the express
tenor of its declarations, obnoxious to the pu-
nishments of another world.

These are a petulance of disposition; a pro-
pensity to ridicule, and treat with contempt,
our Christian brother; and an uncharitable
spirit of calumny, leading us to judge hardly
of him, and of his principles of conduct.

1. A petulance of disposition, which is first
animadverted on by our Saviour, has nothing
to recommend it to us, either as men, or as
Christians. At war with every being who
approaches us, it is no less hostile to ourselves,
destroying as effectually our own peace as it
disturbs that of others. Easily irritated, it is
every moment gaining upon us, and takes
such hold upon our minds, that it is impossible
to say what will be the result to its influ-

ence over them. The shade in which it throws every action, which is at all equivocal, communicates itself so entirely to our reason, that it is incapable of examining the secret motive which may have given birth to it ; and at the same time that it blinds the mental eye, it has the art of satisfying us, on the share of insight, which we think we have, into the affair we are considering, and of hurrying us into a conduct founded on the delusions with which it has gulled us : often under this fell guidance, a word or a look, which in the intention of the speaker and spectator, had the most harmless meaning, becomes the source of the most violent rancour and resentment ; and should unpropitious circumstances occur, and the fire which had been kindled, be fanned by malice or inadvertence, may, perhaps prove as destructive to them as a designed affront, or a premeditated injury : where this is the case, petulance in its consequences, may be equally as atrocious as a murderous intention, directly avowed and put in practice : and indeed, though the result of it be not always so disastrous, yet the progress to the last extremes

tremes is so easily and natural, that no one, who has tasted of its bitterness, can avoid loathing it; no one, I say, who has been under the influence of the mild spirit of Christianity, but must detest it, were its bad effects confined to the destruction of our worldly peace; but when revelation has positively assured us, that it is amenable to the judgment of God, no one, who has the least heaven in his constitution and wishes, but must dread the smallest symptom of its contagion being communicated to him, as a pestilence which may prove his internal ruin.

2. A propensity to ridicule is the next criminal disposition which our Lord has condemned in my text, and that he has done so, cannot be wondered at, if we consider for a moment, the bad principle from which it flows, and the dreadful tendencies to which it leads: for though it generally assumes the garb of wit and good humour, yet, if stript of its borrowed ornaments, and seen through the medium of truth, it will be found to originate, for the most part, in ill nature; in an unworthy disregard of, and contempt for our
u 3 fellow

fellow creature, which induce us to consider him and his actions in a light disgraceful in itself, or injurious to his feelings: and surely nothing can be more unchristian than such motives of conduct, rendered still more base and detestable, by their operating under the mask of hypocrisy, and dreading to be known according to their true nature. If, however, it be alledged, that ridicule may sometimes proceed from a less culpable cause than this, and be indeed, merely the overflowings of pleasantry; yet though it be even assigned to such a principle, it is still to be avoided, from the tendencies we have before hinted it to have; to reflect real disgrace on the object of it, and so injure him in the opinion of others, or to induce him to think himself disgraced, so as to hurt him in his own. Never was there a stroke of ridicule, which had any point or sting in it, without producing, in some degree or other, one of these two alternatives; and whatever may be the source from whence it proceeded, no one can doubt, but that with such consequences, a disposition to it must be highly criminal: and it is
moreover

moreover to be observed, that there is something in the human constitution so repugnant to the endurance of ridicule, that these effects are evident to every one; whence it is plain, that the effusions of it have always so far the guilt of an ill-natured principle in them, that they are poured forth with the conviction of their being galling and ungrateful to the satirized person. Wherefore, under every, the most favourable circumstance which can attend it, it is always sinful; and must, as long as it is a Christian precept, "to do to others, "what we would that they should do unto "us," be subject to the penalties of the gospel of Christ; and for this reason, to a higher degree of them than the petulant disposition before described, because that this is a crime which is committed with the whole concurrence of the will; whereas, that may proceed from constitution or indisposition; and is, strictly speaking, only so far culpable as it is yielded to, notwithstanding the experience of its dangerous consequences and improper principle.

3. A spirit of calumny is the last gradation

tion of criminality, which our Saviour thought proper to notice in my text, and most judiciously has he placed it, as the most heinous of the three, which he intimates to proceed from the murderous spirit in its weaker state of exertion. Calumny of every kind has every disgusting property of ridicule, without any of the palliating circumstances which may sometimes be alledged in excuse for it. It openly avows what ridicule would fain be thought to be exempt from; and points directly at a fellow creature, the shaft which the latter would only have aimed obliquely, and, as it were by chance. This propensity is therefore most justly esteemed odious amongst men, and by the Supreme Being declared to be most detestable to himself; but that species of it, which my text particularly points at, is of the most atrocious nature; namely, that kind which induces a man to judge unfavourably of the religious principles of another, and to vitiate them in the estimation of mankind. To attack a fellow creature upon grounds which have a reference to his eternal welfare, is surely wounding

ing him as deeply as it is possible for human malice, strengthened by the assistance of the devil, to penetrate: it is sapping the foundation upon which all his moral conduct depends, and destroying the only certain confidence which others can place in the rectitude of his dealings; for in all reason, he is no longer to be trusted by men who is proved to be a rebel to his God, and an apostate from his laws. Take away these higher restraints upon human conduct, and you leave the world to all the disorders of the fall, uncorrected by divine grace and authority. No reflection then, can be more severe than that which deprives a man of all the hopes that virtue and piety repose on the goodness of God, and abandons him to the despair of profligacy and wickedness; and nothing can be so alien as the spirit which gives birth to it, from that heaven-born charity, which “thinketh no evil, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things;” which was peculiarly the spirit of Christ upon earth, and which must be the spirit of his disciples, in order to
enable

enable them to have that mind in them, which was in their blessed Saviour, and without which, even the sacrifice of his own most precious blood, can be of no avail to their salvation; but they must fall into that heavy condemnation which has been described by him in the words of my text.

Having thus considered the practical sense of my text in all its parts, I shall only observe, by way of conclusion, that the inference from all that has been said, most clearly is, that the love of our neighbour under the Christian dispensation, is so important a duty, that every deviation from it is subject to the severest punishments. The Moisaical law taught, indeed, its disciples "to love their
"neighbour as themselves;" but then it confined the distinction of neighbour to too narrow limits; for Christianity teaches us, that all men are near to us in a spiritual sense, by a variety of relations which are infinitely more binding than those of place and blood, and which are superior to all the casual circumstances of alienation which may arise from worldly causes. In confirmation of this,
I shall

I shall conclude with recommending to you our blessed Saviour's precept on the subject, in his own emphatic and persuasive terms of expression:—"Ye have heard that it hath
" been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour,
" and hate thine enemy : But I say unto you,
" Love your enemies ; bless them that curse
" you, do good to them that hate you, and
" and pray for them which despitefully use
" you and persecute you ; that ye may be the
" children of your Father which is in heaven ;
" for he maketh his sun to shine on the evil
" and on the good, and sendeth rain on the
" just and on the unjust."

I shall conclude with recommending to you
 every blessed sinners' prayer on the subject
 of love a sympathy and fraternal love of
 neighbor. "Ye have heard that it hath
 been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor,
 and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you,
 Love your enemies; bless them that curse
 you, do good to them that hate you, and
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 and on the good, and sendeth rain on the
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DISCOURSE XIX.

DISCOURSE XIX.

NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

HEBREWS x. Ver. 25.

DISCOURSE XIX.

THE DUTY OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

By James A. Van Ness.

DISCOURSE XIX.

HEBREWS, Chap. x. the 25th Verse.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.

THE text before us is a convincing proof that mankind has, at every period, been subject to the same faults, prejudices, and perverseness of disposition; even in the earlier ages of Christianity, while yet the newly raised fabric of the church was supported on the foundation of apostolic teachers, armed with miraculous powers, and gifts of the spirit; even then, I say, we find that St. Paul had but too much reason to complain of the neglect of public worship by his Hebrew brethren, who perhaps were not the only Christians of his time who adopted this pernicious error; and that it has been propagated to this
later

later ages, no one can doubt, who has capacity enough to draw an inference from a series of facts which are perpetually transacting before his eyes; insomuch, that were we to judge of the duties of our religion by the practice of Christians in general, we should be apt to conclude, that we were expressly commanded, not constantly to attend on public worship, but habitually to neglect it; but, on the contrary, that such a neglect is a most flagrant breach of duty, will be strikingly apparent, if we revert for a moment to the ends for which it was instituted, and has been kept up from our Saviour's time to the present.

When we consider public worship with a reference to Christianity, we shall find that it is intended to be a solemn recognition of our dependance upon God, including an humble declaration of our wants, a supplication of his assistance in future, and a grateful acknowledgment of our having already received it, upon many signal occasions; a recognition made in public, to remind us that our spiritual condition is similar, and that our wants are common; that we are all indebted to the
same

same Benefactor, have all one hope, and one faith, and should therefore be of one mind of love and good-will towards one another; or, in other more concise terms, that it is designed to promote a spirit of piety, humility, and charity. An end this, highly worthy of Christianity, and very exactly correspondent with its own fundamental principles and doctrines, and which is, moreover, as fully answered by the means proposed, as can be by any external ones whatsoever. Instances have, no doubt, occurred, of persons frequenting the house of God, without possessing any of the internal excellencies and qualities of his religion; but we may challenge the bitterest and most artful enemy of Christianity to bring one example of this inconsistency having proceeded, in any respect, from their attendance there. The worst, then, which can be deduced from such instances, is, that public worship does not necessarily make men virtuous; and this may be granted, though we strenuously assert that it has a natural tendency to make them more virtuous than they would be without it. In every system of reformation which is offered

to mankind, we should always recollect, that they are ultimately left to the direction of their own free will, which may therefore defeat the best concerted plan, by a perverse exertion of their own intrinsic power. In the case, then, before us, we should not suppose, that because we see men frequent the church, and yet lead lives directly opposed to those lessons of piety and religion which they have heard there, they would have been better men had they kept at home; but we must attribute their errors to their own obstinacy; which we may well conclude to be an adequate cause to any irregularity of conduct, since it has hitherto resisted the perpetual opposition it has met with from the gospel and its ministers: at the same time Christian charity should induce us to hope, that in the course of their hearing its tremendous truths, some thrilling word may still reach their hearts, and convince them at last of the dangers to which they have been so long exposed: an event not to be expected, in favour of those who have renounced every opportunity of being instructed in their duty, by habitually turning their backs upon the church.

Granting

Granting, then, the advantages of attendance on public worship; the next question which arises on the subject, is, What are the causes of the neglect of it? In reply to this, we may answer, that they are various; but such as operate most commonly, seem to be the following:

1st. A spirit of indolence.

2dly. A vicious life; and,

3dly. An inveterate habit arising from either or both of the former causes.

I. It is incredible to conceive how much we are influenced upon the most important occasions by indolence of disposition. Thus it is, that many a man, if he were asked his reason for absenting himself from public worship, and would candidly acknowledge the truth, would be forced to say, that it was, 'because he was not inclined to do it;' and if again pressed with an enquiry concerning the motive of his disinclination, must own, that in fact he was too lazy to go. Should you endeavour to remonstrate with him on the folly of being influenced by such a brutal principle, you would find him perfectly in-

different and insensible to your arguments.
' He has been busy all the week about his
' worldly concerns, and if he is able to do
' any thing on the Sunday, he must sit down
' to settle his accounts; but as for going to
' church, that is quite out of the question.'

Who does not know that a small portion of fatigue on the seventh day is more injurious and irksome than ten times as much repeated on all the other six? Who does not at least know, that when worldly business and pleasure calls, there is no difficulty found in complying; but that when a religious duty advances its claim, a thousand objections arise, which render it impossible to attend to them? Impossible too, to beings who are exhorted "to work out the salvation with fear and trembling, while yet it is day, lest the night should come, when no man can work:" who are commanded "to watch and pray" with the assiduity and the anxiety of servants, who "know not the day nor the hour, when their Lord cometh."

II. With regard to the second cause assigned for the neglect of public worship, nothing can

can be more repugnant to a constant attendance upon it, than the consciousness of leading a vicious life. When we reflect upon the fear and dread with which profligate and abandoned persons must be struck, as they enter the courts, and as it were, obtrude their imperfections upon the august presence of that God, whom they have been provoking by a series of disobedience and impiety. When we advert to the natural indifference and disgust with which they must regard the service of the church, addressed to a Being, whose loving kindness they have renounced, by divesting themselves of every correspondent love to him. When lastly, we consider the frequent rebukes which their wicked practices meet with there, in the general admonitions delivered from time to time by the ministers of the gospel; rebukes, which when appropriated to themselves by their wounded consciences, have all the offensiveness of personal insult and direct attack; when, I say, we see the united effect of these circumstances, we cannot but wonder that the man who is not awakened to the necessity of repentance and

x 3 amendment,

amendment, but goes on still in the practice of ungodliness, should be one of the last to join in the worship of the church.

III. The last cause I mentioned of the neglect of it, was an inveterate habit arising from either or both of the former causes.

In the case of indolence, it is very evident, that even after the mind has been, in some measure, roused from the torpor of such a disposition, it will be extremely difficult for a man to shake off the custom of absenting himself from the church. Every little excuse which has the semblance of a reason for remaining at home is then embraced, with the specious idea that this particular omission does not arise from a general disinclination, but from an unforeseen preventive which does not extend beyond the present occasion; but which, when diligently examined, will be found to derive all its force from the lurking remains of that indolence which first established the habit so difficult to be shaken off.

In like manner, when a person of a vicious life has been induced to begin a plan of reformation,

mation, it is long before he can give so solid a proof of it, as a regular attendance on public worship. It is one thing to cease to do evil, and another to learn to do well; and a difficult lesson indeed it is, when an inveterate habit has warped us to a contrary tendency, and made us the slaves of sin; deeply sown as the seeds of every vice are in the human constitution, vicious habits have naturally so strong a hold upon us, that it requires a degree of violence to rescue us from that dominion, and an effort constantly exerted to prevent its being resumed upon the first moment of weakness and relaxation.

But in those more dangerous cases, where profligacy, combined with indolence, has rendered the habit doubly inveterate, nothing can be more arduous than to eradicate it; for then, even when the sinner has been induced to desert his evil courses, the sluggishness which has taken possession of his mind, totally indisposes him from adopting any active measures towards positive amendment. Arguments, too, in such a situation, can have little weight; the whole constitution is enervated,

vated, the understanding blunted, and the conscience seared; so that after all, perhaps the cure will end with his abandoning his notorious sins of commission, and the rest of his life be one dismal blank of omission. The result of these observations will tend to shew us how essentially necessary it is to be upon our guard against the first invasion of such dispositions as lead to the establishment of bad habits. The growth of these is gradual; but when they have reached their maturity, it often happens that their dominion is only terminated with our own existence.

We have now considered our three causes of the neglect of public worship, and have only to apply the preceding observations to our own case: and this, I am sorry to say, is the easiest task imaginable. It is too evident to be denied, that the neglect of public worship constitutes, as it were, one of the national sins of our island; and it is more than probable that this proceeds, in general, from the very causes we have been examining; from indolence, and viciousness, and bad habits founded on both of them: and it is of consequence

quence to you to be told, that nothing is more vain than to attempt an excuse for such a conduct. Every irreligious person acts against reason, and against conscience, and at the risque of forfeiting every thing that can constitute his real happiness here and hereafter. In the present instance, you may suppose that I lay too great a stress upon public worship, which you consider as one of the external formalities of religion; but remember, it depends solely upon yourselves to reduce it to a matter of form and ceremony; and that you may either make it an occasion of insulting the majesty of God, by addressing to him the barren service of unhallowed lips, or of offering him the adorations, the petitions, and the thanksgivings of an humble, contrite, and grateful heart. Perhaps too, you may think, why may we not as well pray at home, as at church? And here give me leave to ask you, whether any of you are detained from church by the performance of private devotions at home? I fear not; but even supposing that to be the case, I would remind you that there is a time for all things; and that we are bound
to

to serve God, as well at church, as at home; and that none of us are permitted to modify our services at pleasure; but must render them agreeably to the ordinances and the commands which he has ratified; otherwise there is no substitution of our own, which can justify us in his eyes: besides, if we consider prayer as a duty of any obligation upon us, where can it be discharged with such propriety and effect, as in the temple of that Being, to whom alone it can be addressed? Our blessed Saviour has assured us, that “where two or three are gathered together
“in his name, there is he, in the midst of
“them;” and accordingly we may depend, that every Christian congregation, and every honest and pious individual of them, will never be destitute of the saving influence of his presence and spirit. Till, therefore, we can satisfy ourselves with the idea of resigning up the inestimable privileges of this promise, it must remain an incontrovertible fact, that we cannot with safety absent ourselves from these assemblies, to which it was immediately given. Happy would it be for us, could we be once induced
to

DISCOURSE XIX.

to establish an habitual practice of attending them ; we should then find that there is no more difficulty, and a much greater necessity, to serve God on one day of the week, than to pursue our temporal interests on every other. Such a system of religious intercourse with Heaven would gradually detach us from an inordinate fondness for this world : it would tend to make all the occurrences of life sit easy upon us ; and above all things, would prepare us for that great event, which must one day terminate our own existence ; the approach of which will abundantly convince us of the wisdom of having made the business of religion our first consideration, and the consequent folly of having postponed it to any other. Approach it must, to all of us, and who can tell how soon it may be our lot to be visited ? Let us then, while yet we have opportunity, guard against the dangers of a sudden call ; let us improve to the utmost every occasion of religious instruction and edification ; and having done this, let us depend for the result and reward of our endeavours,

vours, upon the goodness of that God, who has declared, that “ he never faileth them that diligently seek him.”

DISCOURSE XX.

OPPOSITE FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS
AND SIN.

ROMANS, VI. Ver. 21, 22, and 23.

THE
HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF
NEW-YORK
FROM 1624 TO 1800

DISCOURSE XX.

OF THE RIGHTS OF THE
CITY OF NEW-YORK

AND THE
RIGHTS OF THE
CITY OF ALBANY

By
JAMES OSGOOD


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DISCOURSE XX.

See Vol. 2 - 5

ROMANS, Chap. vi. the 21st, 22d, and 23d Verses.

What fruit had ye in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.



THE apostle, in the beginning of the argument under consideration, had regarded the moral world as divided into two descriptions of servants; those of iniquity or sin, and those of God or of righteousness; and in making this allusion, he endeavours to convince his Roman disciples, that if they would

would be consistent with themselves, they ought entirely to devote themselves to the service under which they inlisted; and especially that they, who formerly had been the faithful servants of sin, should now be as faithful servants of righteousness: so far, it appeared to be a matter of strict justice and propriety; the change being previously supposed to have been consistently made. But what if another motive of attachment to their new service intervened, which their previous one wanted? Surely then an additional necessity obliged them to be true to it: now that motive is introduced in my text, in the consideration of the fruits of each; and first of the service of sin; "What fruit," says he, "had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of these things is death." What next are the conditions of the service of righteousness? "Now," says he, "being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life: for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

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And Ist, I shall enquire what are the fruits or effects of the service of sin, and what that end of it is, which he says is death.

And Hldly, I shall examine very briefly into the reason of describing the death he assigns to the service of sin, as the wages of it, while he denominates the eternal life, which he annexes to the other service, the gift of God through Jesus Christ.

list, then, to consider the fruits of the service of sin, &c. The apostle tells us, that they were the fruits of things of which they were ashamed: they were, therefore, such fruits as could not be very pleasant and desirable : for every thing which is capable of
y affording

affording satisfaction, or yielding profit to a rational being as such, cannot impress his mind with any sense of shame, or consciousness of disgrace. Let us consider them as they respect one's fortune, reputation, acquisition of friends, and peace of mind; circumstances which appear to be the most important to the happiness and well being of this present life.

1. In point of fortune, it is clear that oeconomy and prudent management, even of worldly affairs, are much more consistent with a life of virtue than of vice; the desires of which, being extravagant, unreasonable, and of course frequently expensive, must often interrupt every scheme of moderation and decent frugality.

In other cases, however, it is equally clear, that by a different species of dishonest and vitious practice, large and extensive fortunes have been accumulated in a much shorter time, than by measures dictated by scrupulous and conscientious principles: but let us attend to the duration of a mass of wealth so formed. The fact is, that ill-gotten riches seldom

feldom or never remain long with the first possessor and his descendants: the case was the same, even so far back as the times of David, who builds upon his experience of it, in one of his Psalms, a very serious admonition to every man, on the subject of his moral conduct. "Hope thou in the Lord, "and keep his way, and he shall promote "thee, that thou shalt possess the land: "when the ungodly shall perish, thou shalt "see it! I myself, have seen the ungodly in "great power; and flourishing like a green "bay-tree: I went by, and lo! he was gone: "I sought him; but his place could no "where be found! Keep innocency, and "take heed unto the thing which is right, "for that shall bring a man peace at the last."

2. In respect of reputation too, it seldom happens that a man, who has deceived the world into a fallacious persuasion of his possessing a fair and good character, long continues in the enjoyment of it: soon do they discover the cheat, and expose it to every eye; and he himself is not able to support the appearance he at first assumed, and very shortly

meets detection by his own imprudence; even persons of his own cast cannot esteem him, and he soon becomes infamous, in proportion to his demerit. There is a native deformity in vice, which it can never disguise, even from itself; while virtue appears beautiful to her very enemies, commands their admiration, and carries off their suffrage, wherever a preference is disputed between her and her antagonist.

3. What likelihood then can there be for a vitious man to obtain real friends, who know the particulars of his character? Friendship to be permanent must be founded in esteem; and that we have seen is not readily to be attained by the profligate: even among themselves it cannot long subsist: detesting each other's principles, they must continually be suspecting that they will operate to their injury, as well as to that of others, of dissimilar tempers; and besides, they are indifferent about contracting such friendships. It is to the esteem and goodwill of men of virtue that they too aspire; but these are out of their reach. Such men
will,

will, indeed, have compassion on them in the most extensive degree; but every thing like intimacy, familiarity, and close connection, they will studiously avoid: and thus they will be left destitute of any real friends, until a change of conduct and principle can render them worthy of obtaining so valuable an acquisition.

4. But still more impossible is it for them to hope for peace and satisfaction of mind, in the practice of wickedness: conscience, that plain speaker, always suggests the truth, and defies them to be happy and vitious, at the same time. Could you over-rule every difficulty in the way of their acquiring fortune, friends, and reputation, there will still be wanting the best and principal ingredient of happiness. If a man's enemies are those of his household, if his tormentor is in the centre of his mind, how can he rid himself of misery, but by losing all his consciousness, and becoming insensible to every thing? In this world, then, we see that the fruits of sin are by no means such as a man would desire to gather, was the destination of his

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life left to his choice : and if we go a step farther, and look behind the curtain which conceals futurity from our view, we shall find the argument to be still stronger in our favour ; “ The end of these things,” the apostle tells us, “ is death.”

Death, indeed, in its most common acceptance, is the end of every thing here below : “ there the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest :” and how much the sinner dreads that gloomy event, is easy to be known, from the care he takes to remove the idea of it out of his mind, and from the misery he endures, when its actual approach forces him to the serious consideration of its consequences : could we, at an earlier period of life, put ourselves in the place of such a man, under the pressure of death-bed apprehensions, it is impossible that, if any thing short of the fiat of omnipotence could fix us in habits of virtue, we should want a stronger motive or incentive, than the hope of escaping such an agonizing lot. And it is not merely the extinction of being, which they dread in the prospect

spect of death ; it is that undiscovered country beyond it that alarms them, from the consideration that death is a passage to it, and that they are not prepared for such a journey : and it is to the fate which they expect to meet with there, that the apostle ultimately alludes in the declaration under consideration, and in that acceptance he means by the word death, that destruction which an immortal spirit endures, who is excluded from every possibility of happiness, and lives for ever under the consciousness of misery : and that, revelation assures us, is the inevitable consequence of a vitious course of life ; of a life, past in contempt of its clearest admonitions ; of its most express declarations of the divine will ; of its kindest invitations to obedience ; of its strongest assurance of assistance ; and of its most alarming denunciations against those, who will not make use of the means which it proposes to bring us to salvation, in the way of moral amendment and sanctification. To doubt of the truth of it, is to doubt of the moral character of the Supreme Being, and of the authority of scripture ;

which in no respect is more explicit than in its threatnings of punishment to the wicked; and he, who ventures upon sin in the hope of impunity, will one day be convicted to his cost, that he has risked, and that he has lost every thing that is dear and valuable to a rational creature.

And this brings me to consider,

Ildly. What the fruits of the service of righteousness are, and what the apostle means by declaring the end of a conduct, producing such fruits, to be eternal life. Those fruits, he tells us, are unto holiness, and that is the issue of becoming servants to God, or servants unto righteousness, which we shall soon see to be the same thing, the one being the law, and the other, the person who enjoins it: for righteousness intends, that rule of conduct which God has given us through Jesus Christ his ever blessed Son, which he clearly delivered to us by precept, and exhibited in his own example; which approves itself to reason and conscience; which does not expect perfect obedience, but uniform endeavours to do the best we can; and which encourages

courages such endeavours, by involving a promise of divine assistance, to render them effectual, and to fix them in habits of virtue, which habits constitute that holiness mentioned by the apostle; or a general purity of principle and conduct, and a sense of duty continually present to the mind. Such a system, the former part of our discourse may have served to convince us, to be as effectual to render us happy here, as it will assuredly constitute our complete and perfect felicity hereafter; for if vice is an obstacle to procuring us fortune, reputation, friends, and peace of mind, and if these are at all essential to present happiness and comfort, then surely a contrary principle of conduct, must tend to procure us these desirable advantages, and to make our present situation more agreeable; thus in point of fortune, virtue will indeed deter us from making profit by dishonest or unjust means, and it will prevent us from withholding from the needy a part of what we possess; but it will enforce as a duty industrious exertion of our powers, in the sphere of action in which we are placed, to provide for ourselves,

ourselves, our families, and connections; and it will restrain us from those pursuits, which being unreasonable and improper, are for the most part injurious, if not ruinous, even to our temporal concerns; and though it is not to be expected that Providence should continually interfere in the behalf of every individual, and protect him from that suffering which constitutes a material part of our probation, yet it is incontestibly certain, that even in this world he shews, by many striking instances, a difference between the condition of the wicked and the good; such an one as made the Psalmist observe, that “he had
“been young, and then was old, but never
“had he seen the righteous forsaken, or
“their seed begging their bread.” And in the second instance, of reputation, it may be depended upon, that an honest, and good, and pious man, cannot fail to obtain it, even from the most abandoned of men; friends too, he can never want, whose intentions are kind and friendly to every one; never while there is in human nature, an inherent admiration and love of virtue, wherever it is
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to be met with: and peace of mind will be his peculiar blessing, while the world is under the government of a good and gracious God, who never faileth them that seek him; a peace of mind which passeth all understanding; which in every calamity of life uniformly accompanies him, and which at the close of his existence, in the extremity of pain, in the agonies of death, gives him ineffable consolation and comfort, and anticipates that everlasting life of bliss, to which he is approaching; inasmuch as it is assuredly the end of our becoming the faithful servants of God. The condition of that life it is impossible for us to describe: it is, however, fully sufficient for every purpose of encouragement, that we know, upon the authority of God himself, that it will be a state of perfect and never ceasing felicity, in his presence, and in the mansions of heaven.

And this brings me to my

III^d head, wherein I was briefly to enquire into the apostle's reason for calling death the wages of sin; and everlasting life, not the reward, but the gift of God, through Jesus Christ.

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The reason is evident : under every advantage of instruction, admonition, and caution, which men, and Christians especially, enjoy, no one can deny that sin is a most flagrant provocation of God's displeasure. The transgression of an express and reasonable command, given by a Benefactor, upon whose favour we entirely depend, though incapable of diserving it, is an instance of disobedience which admits of no excuse. Death, therefore, in its most aggravated sense, is very justly stiled the wages of sin ; as much its desert, as the stipend, which the labourer covenants to receive, upon doing his duty, rightfully belongs to him : but the case is far otherwise with respect to everlasting life ; for there our labours are not merely compensated by an exact proportion of the premium to the work ; there divine mercy interposes, and rewards us not for our own, but for Christ's obedience : indeed when we consider how poorly our work is done, how imperfect our virtue is, how frequent are our deviations, how great our assistances ; and then transfer our ideas to that glorious inheritance which

which our blessed Lord has purchased for us, we cannot but confess that our claim to it, on the score of merit, is too base an one to be mentioned. Most justly then does the apostle denominate the everlasting life, to which, as Christians, we look forward, the gift of God through Jesus Christ; which, we may observe, by how much the greater it is, by so much the more displays his justice, in sentencing those who slight his bounty to the severest and the most permanent punishment.

Let us, my brethren, be seasonably affected by those momentous truths; we have seen what a barren, what a dangerous service that of sin is; we have also seen the abundant advantages of becoming the servants of God. Our interest, therefore, no less than our duty, calls upon us to chuse that condition, which can alone advance our present and future happiness. Let us then make haste to confirm and act consistently with our choice: and if, through the corruption of our nature, we are so far blinded, as to prefer inferior and delusive prospects of advantage, let us beseech our heavenly Father,

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to open the eyes of our understanding, that we may see, and walk by the light which he has afforded us, and after a life of progressive virtue here, be exalted to that everlasting life of happiness hereafter, which, with all humility and thankfulness, we acknowledge to be his "gift, through Jesus Christ our "Lord."

F I N I S.

